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# HURST AND HANGER

VOL. II.



*John Bonnion.*

# HURST AND HANGER

*A HISTORY IN TWO PARTS*

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

LONDON

KEGAN PAUL, TRENCH, & CO., 1 PATERNOSTER SQUARE

1886





# HURST AND HANGER.

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## PART II.—*continued.*

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### CHAPTER VIII.

Oh Life, oh Death, oh World, oh Time,  
Oh Grave, where all things flow,  
'Tis yours to make our lot sublime  
With your great weight of woe.

R. C. TRENCH.

Two afternoon trains had failed to bring down Sir Philip, and it was dusk when he with the London physician stepped out on the Arnborough platform. Mr. Lister was awaiting them at his own house, and the three drove together to the Hanger. Lady Merivale had by her own desire spent most of the day alone, but Charlie was with her when they heard that Dr. Arthur had arrived. As he bent over his mother's sofa to arrange her cushions afresh, she took his hand and looked at the bright glowing face,

full of the strength and beauty of a happy young life.

‘Thank you, my dear boy,’ she said with a smile; ‘you must let Dr. Arthur see you, that he may not think we are all poor weak invalids at the Hanger.’

The doctors went upstairs, and Charlie repaired to his father in the library. With his own thoughts fixed on all he should have to impart so soon as the house should be again quiet, it was not easy to listen with due attention to Sir Philip’s catalogue of the acquaintance he had met and the shops he had visited. Even the account of his quest after Dr. Arthur was less interesting than it would have proved on any other day. Charlie, with the hopefulness of his age, looked upon the visit of any fresh physician as simply a short road to recovery. And when the doctors at length reappeared, he turned towards them without the smallest misgiving. Dr. Arthur asked for writing materials, and while Sir Philip was providing them Charlie drew Mr. Lister into his own little study beyond the library.

‘Well—what does he say?’ was his inquiry.

Mr. Lister looked at him, then walked in silence to the fireplace, and began to rearrange the sinking wood fire.

‘Tell me,’ urged Charlie. ‘He has seen my mother, hasn’t he?’

‘Yes, certainly—he has seen her.’



‘And what does he say?’

‘He says — various things, my dear Mr. Charles.’

‘Yes, but will she soon be well? Can he do her a great deal of good?’

‘We—have consulted. We—hope, we trust, a new prescription may be able to afford some relief.’

‘Relief!’ Charlie stood dismayed. ‘What do you mean? Won’t she soon be much better—*well*—that is, as well as she used to be?’

Again the doctor turned away to the fireplace. ‘We trust—we trust strength may return in some degree.’

‘Mr. Lister, what do you mean? She will get better!—she *must*! She is not really *very* ill?’ A flood of terror was pouring into Charlie’s soul.

‘My dear Mr. Charlie’—the kind-hearted old man’s voice was trembling—‘my dear boy, I must not deceive you : he does—Dr. Arthur does think your dear mother very, very ill.’

‘*Very* ill?’ For some moments Charlie stood motionless; then turned and, like one walking in his sleep, re-entered the library.

Sir Philip was leaning over the table, his head buried in his hands. The physician was standing near him. Neither moved at Charlie’s approach, until his father, raising his head, groaned rather than said, ‘And have you told her?’

‘I did not mention the word “danger” to

her,' replied Dr. Arthur; 'but I believe you will find that she is well aware of her own state. In these cases, however, all the encouragement that can honestly be given should be used towards the patient. I told her we might hope for relief from some of her symptoms, and for a return of strength, as we may—for a period.'

Sir Philip's head went down again.

'But to you I feel it right to use it, not only that you may never be unprepared for that which may happen very suddenly, but also that the absolute importance of extreme care should be impressed on all around her.'

Sir Philip groaned again. Charlie's heart seemed to be standing still within him.

'It is not so much to mere medical attendance that I refer,' continued Dr. Arthur; 'there I am satisfied she has been in good hands; but to care of another sort which only her family and friends can take. Everything that can harass or disturb the mental powers should be kept from her; no troublesome or distressing thoughts should be placed before her; above all, never let bad news reach her suddenly; for any violent shock—I dare not conceal from you—might be nothing less than fatal.'

'And who is to prevent it?' cried Sir Philip in a burst of despair. 'Her son is with his regiment before Sebastopol; and there you have the history of all her illness!'

‘Of a part of it, no doubt ; and his safe return would—at least it might—do more for her than all the doctors in the country ; but her complaint is a long-standing one. Affections of the heart, as you are aware, frequently last very many years. I can only earnestly hope that there will be no distressing intelligence to be given of your son, and that in any case she may be spared, and prepared, as much as possible. A constant pressure of anxiety on his account is of course unavoidable, but it is not the less to be regretted ; and the chief thought of everyone about her just now should be how they may lighten this pressure by every means in their power. Above all, any extra load of distress or constant worry of whatever kind—these she should certainly be spared. I would not,’ continued Dr. Arthur gravely and kindly, ‘urge this with so much earnestness were I not well assured of its vital importance—an importance which possibly has not been hitherto sufficiently understood. Believe me that the prolongation of her life may depend on this caution being observed.’

Sir Philip sank back in his chair. In doing so he felt his son’s hand upon its back. ‘Are you there, Charlie?’ he asked with mournful helplessness. ‘You hear what Dr. Arthur says : your mother is never to worry herself about Phil or anything ; and how that is to be prevented I, for one, cannot imagine.’



‘Your son will help you, I am sure,’ said Dr. Arthur, turning towards Charlie. ‘In such cases, to have a cheerful young face by one’s side is often the best of remedies. I was going to ask who would be with her.’

‘I!’ cried Charlie, like one starting from a trance. ‘Father!’ He bent his face on his arm against the high-backed chair.

‘My son must go back to Oxford immediately for his examination,’ said Sir Philip in the same hopeless accents. ‘My daughters are married and at a distance. There is no one, no relation. I don’t know what can possibly be done.’

‘You will be able to arrange something, I have no doubt. It is of great importance that Lady Merivale should not be left without cheerful companionship.’

‘Very well; very well.’ Poor Sir Philip rose, his hands and his voice shaking together. ‘There’s Dora, I suppose,’ he went on to himself: ‘yes, there’s Dora, of course; she will have to come—we must see. I—I—you will excuse me, Dr. Arthur, I will leave you for the present. My son is here, he will attend to you.’

He went away, evidently unable to remain.

Dr. Arthur was satisfied. Some previous knowledge of Sir Philip on his own part, joined to a good deal that had been imparted by Mr. Lister, had determined him to speak plainly and strongly. The nervous agitation which now

replaced the baronet's usual self-important staidness showed the physician's practised eye that the work was done, and Sir Philip's alarm effectually aroused. In turning to consider his other companion he felt more uncertainty. Charlie's hands were clasped on the carved crest that surmounted the chair, and his head bent so low upon them that only the chestnut curls clustering round the back of his neck were distinctly visible. But the bending lines of the whole figure, the momentary quiver that passed through the strong young frame, the fingers pressed so tightly against the hard wood that the blood seemed driven back from the nails—all these things he could see, and they were enough to assure him that some severe struggle must be going on within. He was touched, and half regretted that the son should have heard the strong expressions which he had thought it right to use towards the husband.

‘Do not suppose,’ he said very kindly, ‘when I spoke of employing additional care for the future that I meant to say any certain irremediable harm had been done by want of it in the past; only, in these cases, no precautions can be too great.’

Charlie, thus addressed, slowly raised his head, and the physician was disturbed by observing the fixed, unnatural expression of his eyes.

‘Surely,’ he said, ‘you had some idea of the serious nature of your mother’s illness. I thought I understood from Mr. Lister that it was not unknown to her family. If not, I know well that my words must have been a shock to you indeed.’

‘No,’ came in a faint hollow voice from between Charlie’s rigid lips. ‘You don’t know—no one knows.’ He stopped, then cried quickly, ‘Tell me again what you said.’

‘Which part do you mean?’

‘About taking care—about not telling her things.’

Dr. Arthur patiently and carefully repeated his instructions, and his reasons for giving them.

There was a pause when he finished. Charlie was drawn up to his full height, his hands still clasping the chair, his eyes not turned on the physician, but directed straight before him, gazing on vacancy. He spoke at last, in a hollow, monotonous tone, with many pauses, like a child trying to recollect a lesson. ‘So you think—that if there were anything very disagreeable—something that she would dislike very much, going on day after day, and that she knew about it, and was always thinking about it, that it would be bad for her?’

‘Undoubtedly, as I have said.’

‘And if,’ continued Charlie, now turning his gaze on the other’s face, with the same strange



expression, 'there was anyone she loved—very much—in a good deal of trouble—or risk—and they didn't know how it would end—and she was very anxious—that would be bad for her?'

'One of the worst things possible.'

'And if she had to hear such a thing all at once—if there was no way of preparing her—something that would horrify her—you said, didn't you, *that it might kill her?*' There could be no doubt as to the intense earnestness now shining out of the questioning eyes.

'I do not know,' answered Dr. Arthur, in some surprise, 'that I used these very words, but undoubtedly you have exactly stated a case that is most to be avoided in dealing with weakness of the heart. Still you must not be too desponding; you must remember that doctors are not prophets, least of all in such cases as these. It would be possible that your mother might hear really bad news—far worse than I trust will ever have to be communicated to her respecting your brother—and no serious results might follow. This is possible—I dare not say it is probable.'

'But those at home,' said Charlie, with the same low voice and fixed look, 'are to spare her—*everything?*'

'Every anxiety and distress that can possibly be kept from her, every kind of shock that must cause disturbance of mind—*yes, most certainly.*'

‘An uncommonly fine young fellow,’ was the physician’s mental verdict, as another ten minutes saw him driving rapidly away from the Hanger ; —‘but I have seldom seen a man more overset. The father showed it most, but I am mistaken if the son were not the harder hit.’

Once more the Hanger was left in silence. The doctors were gone, and Charlie, left alone in the library, had sunk back in his father’s arm-chair, motionless as the pictured ancestors around him, whose eyes seemed to be watching their descendant in his hour of trial. For an hour had come when a decision must be made that would affect his whole future. It must be made at once and unaided. No friend, no counsellor, could be summoned now to tell him which he was most bound to guard—his own honour or his mother’s life.

In such plain terms the question had been before him since Dr. Arthur’s warning words had fallen on his ear: ‘Everything that can harass or disturb the mind should be kept from her—no distressing thoughts placed before her—any violent shock, I dare not conceal it, might be nothing less than fatal.’

‘Fatal.’ That word, in its awful sudden meaning, had struck upon his heart like the unexpected death-knell of a friend. Was his the hand that should give the first signal for such a knell to be tolled indeed?

It was a question from which the strongest soul might shrink, as Charlie's had shrunk, crushed to the very dust. How long he sat immovable he knew not; nor knew, till the falling embers of the fire roused him to a sense of the present, that the forehead to which he now raised his hand was damp and cold from the dreadful conflict within. The hours were passing. A decision must be made. The letter must be reconsidered — that letter spurned, scorned, trampled on, answered in hot haste, not twelve hours ago. He took it in his hand again, and, going once more to the inner room, spread the torn pages on the table and sat down before them.

With what a confident heart he had read them that same morning! A heart full of indignant amazement, of burning desire for justice and of proud resolution to uphold the honour of his name, in the face, if need be, of the whole world. But in these quickly thronging feelings his mother's welfare had held no place. She had never been thought of. Now a curtain had been withdrawn from before his eyes, and a picture revealed, which, if it could not efface the morning's impressions, had yet set others beside them of still deeper and more constraining interest. In this picture the mother, so long his dearest object, so tenderly and truly loved, regained again more than all her former importance. The

pride and passion of the morning had died away, as earth's loudest noises must die when a voice from eternity has made itself heard. From the couch on which she lay it might be that she would rise no more. Hanging between life and death—the slender cords which bound her to the former committed, so far as human judgment could reach, to the care of others—should he be the one who would rudely break them? Her mind was to be tranquil. No extra weight was to be laid upon it, no harassing anxiety kept daily before it. This was now a first obligation, a precious charge laid upon all who loved her, and to himself, in the absence of all her other children, this sacred duty must especially belong. How was he to fulfil it? If he were to tell her of the monstrous accusation brought against him, and its possible result—a public trial—would this be the way to keep her mind tranquil? Could he suppose that no additional load of anxiety would be pressing on it upon his account? Still more, if the course of the trial should not be in his favour—what then? Such a possibility had not seemed worth one serious thought this morning. Confident innocence would have laughed it to scorn; but confidence and hope of every kind had fled from his worn and saddened soul now. His bright spirit had been dashed to the earth, and tried in vain to raise itself again.

He looked once more on Mr. Mason's letter. It must surely have been a blind indignation that prevented him from seeing before the strength of the testimony which a strange concurrence of circumstances was bringing against him. Could he be certain of proving his innocence in the face of it all? Had other men, guiltless as he, never yet been falsely condemned? What counter-proofs could he produce? His thoughts roamed here and there in vain, searching for some that might possibly be accepted. Could he direct suspicion towards anyone else? Here he paused and meditated—in vain again. There was no one whom he could accuse, even in thought. And if he *were* condemned—a possibility he now obliged himself to face—what would the consequence be? The depth of his love as a son, and of the anguish which Dr. Arthur's verdict had brought to his heart, were proved by the form which the answer to this question now took in his mind. His own feelings and those of his family—the shame, the stain, the misery—were all passed by; he could see one thing, and one only. He saw a mother dead of a broken heart—broken for her son. Such a sorrow as this he never for a moment believed it possible she should survive. Could the son save her from it? Yes, there was one way.

He laid his hand upon the letter before him. 'Thank God! there is this way;' then with a



groan, as his head sank upon his hand, ‘O God, and this is the way—this!’

Yes, this, and no other. He knew it, even though his mind recoiled from the conviction not once but many times. Like a drowning man who stretches out his hands for help, knowing he implores it in vain, Charlie in his despair strained every power of mind to find some escape from the bitter sentence which, at the first moment of comprehending Dr. Arthur’s words, he felt had gone forth against him. In vain! His fate, look at it which way he would, was closing in upon him. Only by silencing this false accusation at once could he hope that it would never be heard or known in his mother’s sick room; and in one way only could it be silenced—by accepting the offer contained in that letter. Yet, to be set down as a thief and forger in the minds of those three men for ever! Was it possible that this was what Love and Duty demanded of him?

Brave men overpowered by numbers, knowing they must die, still yield inch by inch only, fighting to the last. So Charlie fought and wrestled in his mind; so he retreated in thought from post to post, still with his face towards his enemy, till the last stronghold seemed to be reached. He had looked in every direction, and had found no possible rescue. Might it be that another would? Where was the other who

could be asked? Not his father. Instinct had supplied the place of reason in warning him that his father's judgment must not be trusted with such a decision as this. His family pride might be too great on the one hand, or his alarm and distress on the other. All might be revealed to Lady Merivale in a sudden burst of feeling, and the whole work of caution frustrated through a momentary want of self-command. His uncle? He was far away. Dora? Had Dora been at hand, doubtless she would have heard all; but she was not. The hour was late; a course must be chosen without delay. Besides, why lay upon any other the burden of so painful a decision as this?

Charlie did not deceive himself. He knew the nature of the trial that lay before him; he knew it to be one which any friend must shrink from the responsibility of urging him to undergo. If he chose this hard and narrow path, he must do it alone. Could he choose it?

He rose, and moving to the window flung open its diamond casement. The glorious hunter's moon, rising above the heavy-headed elms of the avenue, was casting her silvery light upon the garden without. Charlie flung himself down upon the deep window-seat, turning his face towards the soft still air of the October night. As he did so, his hand fell upon two books; he took them up mechanically. One was his

Aristotle. This he put down again. How far away Oxford life, his examination, and all that had so lately filled his thoughts seemed to have retreated now! But the other, and much smaller book, he placed, after looking at it for a moment, on the sill of the window before him, where the moonlight could fall upon its familiar crabbed characters. The book was familiar too, as well as its lettering, and he turned its pages in search of one particular passage. These were the words on which his eyes soon rested:—

Εἰ ἀγαθοποιοῦντες καὶ πάσχοντες ὑπομενεῖτε, τοῦτο χάρις παρὰ Θεοῦ. Εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ ἐκλήθητε ὅτι καὶ Χριστὸς ἔπαθεν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, ἡμῖν ὑπολιμπάνων ὑπογραμμόν, ἵνα ἐπακολουθήσητε τοῖς ἰχνεσιν αὐτοῦ.<sup>1</sup>

He read, mused, read again; then raised his eyes to the scene above him—to the dark blue heavens, the innumerable stars, the moon's unclouded majesty. Long and silently he gazed, until he felt that the book in his hand and the glories overhead were his best friends and counsellors at such an hour as this. Here was a voice from the unseen, here were emblems of eternity, telling him of truths which must endure when the conflicts and sorrows of earth should have passed away for ever. All high and holy thought, when courted and gladly entertained in quiet hours, comes back—an angel visitor—in moments

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter ii. 20, 21.

of distress and agony, to comfort and support the soul that has loved it. Charles Merivale's was such a soul. He bent his face on his hands now, and communed in silence with the Source of strength.

When he raised it again his countenance had changed. The youthful brightness which never until this day had been wanting to it was gone; the anguish and despair which the last few hours had impressed upon it were gone also. A new expression had come upon the pale, rigid features and the lips set together in curves like those of a marble statue. As he rose and stood motionless, with folded arms, the moonlight fell upon a countenance as grand and as resigned as that of any young martyr looking up for the last time on earth to the heaven where he soon hoped to be. Had Charlie's been such a hope, his part, if a yet more solemn, would also have been a simpler one. Half of its difficulty consisted in the responsibility of choice. He had chosen—he believed he had chosen absolutely—and yet the haunting doubt would recur—had he chosen rightly? Was this doubt the voice of wisdom, or was it the Tempter's whisper in his soul? God, before now, had sent signs and visions to men in great perplexity. Would it be wrong if he, too, should ask for such a sign to set a divine seal upon his human choice?

Still buried in thought, he closed the case-

ment and, turning, slowly took his way through the empty rooms and passages of the now silent house. He passed up the staircase and on towards his mother's room. It was late, but a light still shone through the partly opened door, where he first knocked, then softly entered.

She was lying on the sofa, with closed eyes. All round her seemed the same, and yet—how changed! When she opened her eyes and smiled, he knelt beside her to hide his own face in a close embrace.

‘I knew you would come,’ she said. ‘But it is late, dear Charlie; your father has gone to his room already.’

He answered only by a kiss.

‘My Charlie! You have been sitting alone, and grieving.’

‘Oh, mother!’—such a groan she had never heard from her boy's lips before—‘you must get well! We will have all the doctors in London down to cure you!’

She smiled again. ‘One is enough for me, dear boy. Everything that love and care can do will be done, I know; and they are strong ties; they can do much.’

She paused; then continued—

‘But they cannot keep us here for ever. We should not wish it, if they could—should we?’

He could not speak. She stroked the chestnut curls with gentlest touches.



‘My Charlie will submit, and he will help his mother?’

‘Yes,’ was the low whispered answer.

‘And you will pray that if it is His will I may live to see him—your brother—once more?’ The voice, which had been so quiet, was trembling now.

Charlie raised himself with a calmer air.

‘I will, mother. And you will let us watch over you, and think, and care, and do everything for you now?’

‘As you have always done, my Charlie—I will, indeed! Dr. Arthur asked who would be with me, and I said, “My son.” If I could only have told him how thoughtful, how tender, a son it would be!’

With one more embrace, and the mother and son parted, and Charlie, going straight to his own room, asked no further sign.

## CHAPTER IX.

All was clear,  
There was but one right thing in the world to do,  
And I must do it.—C. KINGSLEY.

THE three partners in the Compton Bank met with more than ordinary punctuality on the morning of the following day. Mr. Aldis, the senior partner, was the first to take up a pile of letters, from which he held one out towards Mr. Mason.

‘This must be it, Mason; let us hear what he says.’

Mr. Mason looked at it; this was no doubt the answer from the Hanger. Reflection had served only to make him more and more doubtful as to the wisdom of the offer the letter of the firm had contained. He shook his head.

‘Better open it yourself, Aldis,’ he said.

Mr. Aldis, withheld by no doubts or associations, at once broke the seal and read the contents to his two companions.

‘The young gentleman takes it with a high hand,’ he said coolly, as he laid the letter on the

table. 'Well, our part has been done, not to say overdone.'

Mr. Broad, a man of few words, with many shakes of the head walked to the fireplace, and, tucking his coat tails under his arms, took up a position on the hearthrug, to await his partners' further decisions. Mr. Mason was examining the letter afresh.

'Aldis,' he said, 'I never saw anything that looked more like innocence.'

Mr. Aldis' eyebrows went up considerably.

'And if you had seen him,' continued Mr. Mason, 'I believe you would say the same. You cannot imagine a face with more truth in it.'

'I have no desire to imagine anything. I inquired what counter-evidence he could produce; from your account, there was absolutely none.'

'No; but the probabilities of the case appear to me, on thinking them over again, to be greatly in his favour. Why need a young man in his position try to come dishonestly by twenty pounds?'

'Probabilities, like faces, go for nothing when it comes to a question of evidence. It might be said, no doubt, of half the crimes of which men are found guilty, that there was no antecedent probability they would commit such. In this case, however, putting previous character, of which we know nothing, out of the question,

I see no improbability about it. I don't suppose there's a more extravagant set of beings in the world than young men at college. Half of them are always in debt.'

'That's true,' said Mr. Broad emphatically.

'And if he did owe twenty pounds,' said Mr. Mason, 'what need that be to a son of Sir Philip Merivale?'

'But how can we tell that he dare apply to his father, or that his debts may not have been paid half a dozen times over already. No; I should have been as glad as either of you if the young man had cleared himself; but since he has neither done this, nor accepted an offer which everyone would not have made him, there is nothing left for it; our course is clear.'

'Ah—eh?' said Mr. Broad. 'Prosecute? That's bad, too.'

'It will be disagreeable, certainly, but what are we to do? We have weighed the whole subject already, and considered all the evidence. Consider the fact that he was in Compton at the very hour—that he left his horse at an unusual place—that White's impressions are entirely in favour of his being the man, and, above all—the letter itself. Join to this what we now know from Mason—that he can produce no witness who could testify to his having been elsewhere in Compton that afternoon, and cannot give the slightest idea as to any second person

into whose hands the letter might have fallen. We have felt that this constitutes so strong a case that though we were willing to show mercy on account of his youth, it was but our duty to make him virtually confess his guilt to ourselves. I could never have reconciled it to my conscience to have let him off without this amount of punishment, as well as that of making the whole known to his father. Well—we have been ready to be merciful—and what happens? He entirely rejects our offer.’

‘And that rejection, and his whole behaviour,’ interrupted Mr. Mason warmly, ‘look so like innocence that I am for reconsidering the whole thing again.’

‘Guilt can look like innocence as easily as innocence may look like guilt.’

‘You have not seen him, Aldis; if you had——’

‘If I had, I may venture to say it would make not the smallest difference. How can his looks or his words be weighed against the total absence of any contrary evidence?’

‘This letter itself I call presumptive evidence.’

‘Not at all! He may rely on his father’s position for getting him off clear with any country jury.’

‘You seem determined to turn everything to his disadvantage.’

‘And you to his advantage. Now tell me,



Mason, how much additional proof would it take to make you believe him guilty ? ’

‘Accepting our offer would have done so.’

‘To be sure,’ assented Mr. Broad ; ‘there could be no doubt then.’

‘Indeed ! you own so much, but—— Was not that a knock ? ’

It was, and not the first, their conversation having been too animated to suffer them to hear the knocks without. Now the door opened, to admit a visitor, unexpected by all, and unknown to two of them.

‘Mr. Merivale,’ exclaimed Mr. Mason, as he stepped quickly forward, then as suddenly stopped. The name was involuntarily echoed by his two companions, each in his own note of surprise, as they gazed with keenest curiosity on the new comer.

‘He has come to brazen it out,’ was Mr. Aldis’ first swift reflection. ‘Very well, my fine fellow ; you will find blustering and bullying to be but lost time here.’

Charlie, on his side, stood still and silent, making no motion beyond a slight bow on entering, while Mr. Mason was looking in wonder at his pale face with its heavy eyes and altered expression.

‘Will you not sit down, Mr. Merivale ? ’ he asked, breaking the awkward silence ; then, turning slightly, he named his partners.

Charlie bowed again, but merely laid his hand on the back of the offered chair. Mr. Aldis resumed his own, and, crossing his legs, leant back in independent integrity, well-resolved to be turned from his purpose by no threatening words, nor deluded from it by any young man, however specious, tall, or handsome.

‘Can you be so good, gentlemen, as to let me have a few minutes’ conversation? I have ridden over early this morning in the hope of finding you here.’

This was their visitor’s first address—milder in its tone certainly than the senior partner had expected. But his surprise was as nothing to that of Mr. Mason, who heard with a fresh astonishment the changed, spiritless accents.

‘We are at your service, sir,’ was Mr. Aldis’ dry reply.

‘You received my letter, I see,’ continued Charlie in the same low tone, his eyes directed towards the table on which it lay. ‘If you have no objection I should like to see it again;’ adding, as Mr. Aldis hesitated a moment, ‘I hardly remember what I said. It was written hastily.’

It was handed across to him, and the eyes of the three partners were fastened upon him with closest attention while he bent his head over his own letter—an attention that was not diminished by the vivid colour which rose for a

moment in his pale cheeks, or the deep unconscious sigh with which he folded it again. Raising his eyes, not to their faces, but to the window above their heads, he remained for some moments lost in thought, then gave the letter back again. 'Yes,' he said; 'I see. Thank you.'

The sad, abstracted air and manner puzzled, while they interested, Mr. Mason more and more.

'Pray sit down, Mr. Merivale,' he urged again. 'You are tired this morning—or not well.'

'Yes, ; I am well,' was the hurried answer. He made one step towards the table. 'I ought to tell you why I am here.' A moment's pause and he went on. 'That letter was written as soon as I had read yours, and directly Mr. Mason had left the house; and when I wrote it I meant it—every word. But now—' and his voice grew dry and hard, 'if it is not too late, I should wish to cancel that letter, and to accept your offer.'

Mr. Broad's feelings were shown in a short low whistle. Mr. Aldis' by a single irrepressible 'Ah!' while he involuntarily turned a meaning glance upon Mr. Mason. It was the latter who was so thunderstruck at the words that he could hardly believe he had heard them aright.

'Accept it?' he cried, starting forward. 'Accept the proposal—Mr. Merivale?'

Charlie could not speak; he bowed in silence.

Mr. Mason turned from him and walked to

the window in inexpressible mortification. He was in a strange position. Two days ago only the question of sending or not sending this offer to Charles Merivale had been warmly discussed by the three managers. Mr. Aldis had been against it, but had yielded to the representations of Mr. Broad, the good-natured father of many sons, and to those of Mr. Mason himself. Mr. Mason was a truly kind and compassionate man, and had thought at the time that it was in all probability giving another chance to a man who had, while still very young, fallen beneath a sudden temptation. In this belief he had gone to the Hanger. Even while there, and still more on subsequent reflection, he had seen reason to doubt his first conclusions. Charlie's appearance and manner, in spite of one suspicious circumstance, had appeared to him incompatible with the existence of deceit. They had excited such strong feelings, both of admiration and respect, in his breast, that a belief in Charlie's innocence had taken full possession of his mind even before he had heard the letter of this morning. In proportion to his past security was his present disappointment. Convicted out of his own mouth, his words uttered not five minutes before obliged him to believe that the man who stood before him was guilty of forgery.

Charlie watched him with a perfect understanding of the whole. He, on his part, had

been endeavouring to prepare himself for his task by imagining the worst that must be thought and said. But with all his efforts he had not been able to conceive what the sharp reality would be like—the first moment of knowing that the men before whom he stood were looking upon him as dishonoured. He locked his hands so tightly together that all feeling was numbed, biting his lip, as though to keep back by main force the words that seemed on the point of thronging through them to tell these men that he was neither thief nor forger. There was a minute's silence in the room, and the quiver of passion passed away, leaving such bodily weakness behind it that he was glad to grasp the back of the chair once more as a support.

‘This,’ began Mr. Aldis, in his ordinary business-like voice, ‘is an unexpected request, sir. Are we to understand that you desire absolutely to cancel that letter which lies before us?’

‘Yes—I suppose. Yes, I do.’

‘And to return an answer of a different nature?’

‘Yes.’ A pause ensued. Mr. Aldis was looking at him keenly. ‘You have, then,’ he said at last, ‘changed your mind since you wrote this letter yesterday?’

Charlie bowed.

‘And do you wish to assign any reason for this sudden change?’



It was a question for which he had prepared himself. The answer was ready.

‘There is a reason, but I cannot give it. You must think of me, gentlemen, as you choose. If you can believe me capable of such a deed as this, it is out of my power to prevent you. I can only say that I never heard of the forged cheque until I was informed of it by Mr. Mason yesterday morning.’

His voice was firm and even haughty. Again Mr. Aldis’ gaze seemed searching into his very soul.

‘You are resolved, Mr. Merivale, to assign no reason for your application?’

‘I am resolved.’

‘Very good. We will request you to put the application down on paper. If you will then return in a quarter of an hour we shall be able to give you a final reply. After so sudden a change on your own part, you cannot be surprised that we, on ours, should require some time for deliberation.’

Charlie bowed, seated himself at the table, and took the offered pen and paper. He leant his brow on his hand for a few moments in thought, then wrote these words:—

‘GENTLEMEN,—I have come to accept your offer, and to request you to take no legal proceedings with regard to the cheque.’

How hard a three lines to write! How bitter

to sign at the end of them that 'Charles Ernest Merivale,' which he had never till now feared would be a name of disgrace! He rose and, pushing the paper hastily across the table, left the room. Confused and half dizzy, he made his way through the bank into the street, not knowing which way to turn nor where to spend the allotted time. A church clock, giving out its quarters, struck upon his ear. He looked up at its grey tower and at the open churchyard gate, entered, and, following the short flagged path which none he thought could ever have trodden with a heavier heart, sank down upon the seat within the old porch, there to wait until the clock's next summons should call him out to finish his appointed task.

Less time than a quarter of an hour would have sufficed for all the discussion that was held in his absence. The three gentlemen looked in silence at the second note, and each one, turning away, waited for another to speak.

Mr. Broad waited until he was tired of it. 'Well?' he said, looking from partner to partner. 'Well?'

'Ask Mason if he thinks it is "well," now,' answered Mr. Aldis.

'You both know what I must think, Aldis.'

'We know what you said you would think if the offer were accepted.'

'Yes; you may triumph over me as much

as you please. I have never been more astonished in my life ; seldom so much pained.'

Mr. Aldis did not seem disposed to triumph. He took up the two notes again and, placing them before him on the table, sat looking from one to the other.

'Well,' said Mr. Broad again, 'what's to be done? Better stand to our first offer, eh?'

'Let us hear what Mason says.'

'I would rather not be the first to speak. You and Broad seem to have had clearer ideas on this matter than I.'

'I am clear about this,' said Mr. Broad sturdily, 'that what I wished at first, I wish still—to save a family from disgrace and a young fellow from ruin. His having chosen to shilly-shally about our offer makes no difference to me.'

'I wish the same,' said Mr. Mason.

'Well, be it so. I agreed to this before, on condition of his making the application, and I will not retract because it has been made somewhat late and ungraciously. But it is a strange affair.'

'One of the strangest I ever heard of,' said Mr. Broad. 'To think of that young fellow daring to brazen it out at first with such a letter, and then getting frightened and rushing over here post-haste! He might well be frightened! If we had cut up rough, and refused to hear him, he would have been a lost man.'

‘That is your view of the affair?’ said Mr. Aldis.

‘To be sure. What could such a letter have been but a flourish?’

‘You see,’ said Mr. Mason, ‘he still maintains his innocence.’

‘Nothing in the world but another flourish,’ said Mr. Broad. ‘All of a piece. He wants to get the benefit of our soft-heartedness without confessing his guilt; but that won’t do, my fine fellow, we can see through that. An uncommonly bad business it is,’ he continued, shaking his head very seriously, ‘I wouldn’t have believed it, to look at him. He is young yet—not much above twenty I should guess—and that’s the only thing to be said for him. He may mend, if he will take this as a warning; and if he does go to the dogs by-and-by, as is only too likely, it won’t be our doing. Someone ought to say a word to him though—tell him it’s ten to one if he ever gets off so easily again; put it to him seriously, won’t you?’

‘Ah!’—there was a twinkle of dry humour in Mr. Aldis’ glance not likely to be perceived by the worthy man towards whom it was directed—‘Give him some words of wisdom yourself, Broad; with your own six sons you ought to be in practice.’

‘Not I! My boys don’t come to me much for advice, I can tell you; though, thank Heaven,

they none of them ever played a dirty trick in their lives!’

‘Well, then, unless Mason likes to undertake the office, we will leave him to his conscience. Preaching to young men is not much in my line.’

Again the three remained silent until startled by a knock at the door, so loud this time that there was no possibility of overlooking it. ‘Already!’ said Mr. Aldis, with a glance at the clock. ‘He is in a hurry. Well—come in.’ The door opened to admit, not Charles Merivale, but Jonas Grover.

All three countenances darkened. Grover had appeared at the Bank a sufficient number of times already to show its managers how coarse and obnoxious a man they had the misfortune of being mixed up with in this affair. Properly speaking, as the loss fell not on him, but on the firm, he had no direct interest in the matter, yet it was difficult to put him altogether on one side, or to deny him any right of inquiry, especially as their wish to persuade him into silence made it necessary to keep on apparently friendly terms. Of their letter to the Hanger he knew nothing, nor did they intend that he should ever come to a knowledge of it. His heavy step, therefore, had never fallen more unpleasantly on their ears than at the present moment, and a rebuff rose most temptingly to Mr. Aldis’ lips when he saw the man’s coarse

form and features filling up the doorway. Could this be injured innocence? and was that hardened guilt which had so lately left them? His friend Mason had been weak, doubtless, in being worked upon by personal appearance; yet in this instance Mr. Aldis secretly owned that there might have been unusual inducements.

‘Morning, gentlemen,’ began Mr. Grover, with a nod all round, while he took up his position by Mr. Broad, upon the hearthrug. ‘I heard from my foreman, down there,’ jerking his thumb over his shoulder, ‘that he saw your trap turn in through the Hanger gates yesterday, so I’ve come over to hear what the game is. Baronet down on his knees yet, eh?’

Mr. Mason, to whom this was addressed, returned an impenetrable look.

‘Sir Philip Merivale,’ said Mr. Aldis, ‘was not at home.’

‘Ah! we’re all up to that dodge, I guess,’ said Grover with a sneer. ‘But you don’t mean to tell me,’ he continued, again addressing Mr. Mason, ‘that you were inside those gates the best part of an hour, and saw no one?’

‘Sir Philip, as you have heard, was not at home,’ was Mr. Mason’s cold reply. ‘There is nothing fresh to be told, Mr. Grover.’

‘Why, then you saw the young ’un himself, I suppose, didn’t you?’

‘My visit produced no material results, sir.



We are pressed for time this morning, and must beg you——’

‘You did see him ! And what did the young scamp say?’

‘Mr. Grover,’ interrupted Mr. Aldis, ‘this is a busy morning ; we are forced to ask you to defer your inquiries. I have already informed you that the missing twenty pounds have been placed once more to your account. Thus, you see, your direct interest in this affair being closed, it remains with us to conduct it in the manner that seems most in accordance with the interest of this Bank.’

‘What ? What ?’ Grover’s scowl was ominous. ‘You want to do it behind my back, do you ? Not if my name’s Jonas Grover !’

Mr. Aldis took up one of the unopened letters before him and began breaking its seal, while indicating by a look and sign to Mr. Broad that until Grover had gone out Charles Merivale must not come in. Signals, however, were apt to be lost upon Mr. Broad, and it was Mr. Mason who went towards the door.

‘Stop a bit,’ said Grover, as he placed himself in front of it. ‘Before you leave this room, sir, I want to ask you three gentlemen one plain question : What are you up to with your visits to the Hanger ?’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Aldis, ‘once for all, we decline discussing our private affairs.’

‘Private!’ cried Grover, with an oath. ‘That’s good, when it’s my name he forged and my money he’s stolen! Now I’ll just tell you what it is: you are trying to blind my eyes; but I see your game—a rascally game as ever was! You want to let off this young rogue because he’s a baronet’s son. This is your “private business”! A sneaking, cowardly, dishonest trick, say I!’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Aldis, starting up, ‘if you do not leave this room at once, we will find means to make you!’

‘But I just give you warning that the whole town shall hear of your “private affairs,” and the county too! I fear no baronet nor lord neither! Sir Philip has never done me a good turn, and he shall get what he gives for once. You may be as mum as you please, but who’s to stop my mouth if I choose to tell all the world that the son’s a rascal?—and the father the same, I’ll be bound! Who can stop me, I ask?’

‘I, sir!’

Grover started and turned. Charles Merivale had entered and was standing beside him, with a face of scorn from which the man involuntarily shrank. The next moment, however, his usual insolence reasserted itself.

‘What,’ he said, ‘so you’re here, are you? Happy to see you, Mr. Merivale. Glad to have an opportunity of thanking you for the honour

you've done me in making use of my humble name. It's a great condescension in one of your family, I'm sure !'

Mr. Aldis again started forward, but his visitor was quicker. Stepping close up to Grover, 'Sir,' he said, 'you may use what language you please towards myself, but not one syllable against my father. Remember that !'

The tone of conscious strength, the fire in his eye, and flush on his cheek, were totally different from the lifeless, dejected bearing with which he had stood in that room before, and Mr. Mason for the first time recognised the Charlie of yesterday.

'You want to bully me, do you ?' answered Grover with another oath, yet retreating backward as he glanced up at the firm face, broad shoulders, and folded arms.

Charlie did not move an inch. 'I wish you to understand,' he said with steady distinctness, 'that Sir Philip's name is not to be dragged into this affair at all. Say what you please of me, but not one single word like those I heard just now. You understand !'

'Ah ! and who's to stop me from speaking as I choose ?'

'I, sir ; and you will find that I have the power !'

He raised his right arm with the long riding-

whip in his hand ; for a moment only—but there was no mistaking the action. Grover cowered involuntarily, then tried to laugh.

‘Hands off, young man,’ he cried, ‘or you may chance to find yourself in a court of justice yet. Not much fear either that I should be troubling myself about the father, when there’s so much to say about the son ! A pretty tale to tell of such a fine young gentleman ! Ha ! ha ! Good morning, Mr. Merivale. Good morning, gentlemen ; won’t detain your “private business” any longer !’ And, to the relief of all, the door closed behind him.

‘Lock it,’ said Mr. Aldis promptly. ‘Now, Mr. Merivale, we will finish ; this interruption was an unfortunate accident.’

Charlie turned with a stifled sigh. Mr. Aldis was far harder to face than Mr. Grover.

‘We have considered the matter,’ continued the former. ‘My partners and I are willing to look upon your first letter as cancelled, and to abide by our own offer. You wish to accept it, and we agree to this. No proceedings shall be taken by us.’

Charlie’s ‘Thank you’ was hardly audible.

Mr. Aldis looked in vain for any signs of relief or gratitude. ‘It is not my business to praise ourselves,’ he went on coldly, ‘or I might be inclined to point out the unusual lenity we have thought well to show.’

‘And which we hope we shall never have cause to regret,’ struck in Mr. Broad.

‘No, I hope not.’

Charlie spoke mechanically. Though accepting by his actions the position of a guilty man, his mind had not yet grasped the idea in all its bearings. He now sat down, produced from his pocket a little book, of a kind most familiar to his companions’ eyes, and, taking up a pen once more, hastily wrote a few words, tore out the leaf, and offered it to Mr. Aldis. It was a cheque on an Oxford bank for twenty pounds.

Mr. Aldis looked first at the cheque and then at the writer in displeased surprise. ‘May I ask, sir,’ he said sternly, ‘what you mean by offering me this?’

‘To pay the money you have lost. You cannot suppose that since by agreeing to my request you forfeit all chance of recovering it again in any other way, I should agree to your being the losers on that account.’

There was a moment of silent astonishment, broken into by Mr. Broad.

‘Bless my heart, sir! what can you be thinking of? Do you mean to insult us? How can we possibly take a cheque from you at such a time as this?’

‘Insult you!’ said Charlie. ‘No! Why cannot you take it?’ But at that moment a light seemed to break upon him. The blood rushed

to his face, he drew his breath sharply between his teeth. 'I forgot,' he said. 'Of course! My word and my signature are both worthless to you now.'

It was more than he could bear. He sank upon a chair, and, leaning his arms on the table, buried his face in his hands.

Again there was a silence.

'You are mistaken, Mr. Merivale.'

Charlie looked up again. Mr. Aldis was the speaker, and some change had come over the previous sternness of his tone.

'We decline receiving this cheque for a totally different reason. If we choose to pass over the whole matter in silence and take the loss ourselves, we have a right to do so; no one can force us to prosecute. But to receive money for doing this would be like accepting a bribe; it would (or might) be hush-money. That is what Mr. Broad intended to express.'

'Indeed!' Charlie drew a long breath. 'I did not know that, or I would never have offered it. You will not believe, I am sure, that I meant to ask you to do anything dishonourable. But,' with a sudden start, 'I forgot; you will believe anything of me!'

The spasm of pain and indignation which passed across his countenance was evident to all.

'No,' said Mr. Aldis. 'I do not believe it. I am convinced you did not know.'



Charlie turned his eyes upon him with a look of sincerest gratitude.

‘Nevertheless, this cheque’—and Mr. Aldis tore it across—‘can be nothing to us. Mr. Merivale, we may consider this painful business to be concluded—unless, indeed,’ and once more he paused and looked at him, ‘you yourself have anything to add.’

‘There is nothing I can add.’

Charlie had risen, and was standing before them lost for a few moments, as it seemed, in thought. Then he raised his eyes to the three faces before him.

‘Gentlemen, I must thank you all for the courtesy you have desired to show me. Good morning.’ He bowed, and was gone.

Mr. Aldis stood looking at the closing door with an expression hard to be read.

‘Aldis,’ said Mr. Broad, ‘what d’ye think of it all?’

‘I think—the affair is over! Where is White? He can bring in his accounts now—the blind bat! Not another word, Broad, pray; we have wasted half the morning already.’

## CHAPTER X.

That thou art blamed shall not be thy defect,  
For Slander's mark was ever yet the fair.

SHAKESPEARE'S *Sonnets*.

FOR Dora to receive a note from Sir Philip was a surprising event, and when one was handed to her at luncheon-time she immediately imagined it must contain news of the two travellers. Sir Philip, however, expressed a desire merely that nothing might prevent her from coming to the Hanger that afternoon for an hour, and she wondered at his writing for so slight a cause until, on turning the page, a final sentence appeared: 'Dr. Arthur was with us yesterday. His report, I regret to say, was not reassuring.'

Dr. Arthur at the Hanger, and she had known nothing of it! And his report—it must have been alarming indeed to make Sir Philip express himself like this! Begging Miss Goode to order the pony-carriage, Dora, in great anxiety, at once ran to her room to prepare for the drive. In five minutes she was joined there by her old friend in a state of breathless agitation.

'Dora, my dear child,' she cried, 'have you

heard this extraordinary story that has got into the house? It is shameful!—scandalous!’

Such words in Miss Goode’s mouth betokened something marvellous, and Dora turned round in astonishment.

‘People should be punished,’ Miss Goode continued, though hardly able to speak from indignation, ‘for repeating such things; they really should. I can’t think what the world is coming to if people can be found to say such things. They say—they declare that there has been a robbery—a cheque forged on the Compton Bank—and that Charlie did it—*Charlie!*—imagine that!’

‘Impossible! Nobody can be so mad!’

‘The best little boy—as he always was,’ proceeded Miss Goode, half crying, ‘the most conscientious child that ever lived! How can people be found to believe such things? It is horrible!’

To Dora it appeared to be something else. She merely laughed.

‘Oh, Goody, you don’t mean to say you are distressing yourself about anything so utterly ridiculous?’

‘Ridiculous—is that what you think it?’

‘Of course! Who that knows Charlie could ever listen to such a thing for a moment? Don’t you see how absurd it is?’

‘But the maids are all talking of it,—Mrs.

Sage and all ! Brown, the butcher, has just told them.'

'It is some utter mistake—a name misheard, or very likely the whole story false. The maids should be ashamed to listen to such nonsense. Is the pony-carriage come?'

'But you will hear them? You will see Mrs. Sage?'

'No, indeed. I would not even ask about anything so foolish, and I cannot wait. Good-bye, dear Goody, put it all out of your head. I dare say the maids will hear the truth by tea-time.'

She ran downstairs and, springing into the pony-carriage, drove quickly away, a painful anxiety to learn Dr. Arthur's opinion banishing from her mind every other thought, when, on turning from the Hurst road into that which ran from Arnborough to the Hanger, she found herself obliged to stop. A pleasing-looking, elderly man was advancing towards the carriage, and stopped as it approached. He was the principal bookseller of Arnborough—well known to them all, and a particular friend of her uncle's. Dora drew the pony's reins, and inquired if Mr. Johnson had been coming up to the Grange. This proved to have been the case, and on hearing of the Vicar's absence Mr. Johnson looked concerned.

'Did you want to see him particularly?'

Dora asked.

He hesitated. 'Well, ma'am—yes. On rather a strange business, too.'

'Really! Is it any question I could answer for him?'

Mr. Johnson hesitated again. 'You have not heard anything about this unpleasant business, have you, ma'am?' he asked doubtfully.

'No. What business is it?'

The old bookseller looked up and down the road; then, though not a creature was in sight, stepped closer to the carriage and spoke in a low tone: 'There's a very monstrous report going about the place, ma'am. Have you heard that a forgery has been committed on the Compton Bank, and that there are people saying young Mr. Merivale has been charged with it? You will excuse my mentioning such a thing.'

The colour rushed to Dora's face. 'I did hear of such a story not ten minutes ago,' she said proudly, 'but it seemed to me too foolish to take the least notice of; nobody would believe it!'

Mr. Johnson shook his head. 'I heard it,' he said, 'from twenty different people this morning, till I could stand it no longer; so I was coming up to ask Mr. Merivale if the family wouldn't take some steps to stop it.'

'Surely such a falsehood had better be left alone! People ought to be ashamed of themselves for listening to such a thing. Who could have spread it?'

‘Grover himself, ma’am ; it was his name that was found, you know.’

‘I never heard that !’

‘Yes. And he goes about saying that it was done by a young man, a stranger at the Bank, and that a letter fell out of his pocket with Mr. Charles Merivale’s name on it.’

‘But is that true?’

‘That is what no one knows. They say you can’t get a word out of the people at the Bank, good or bad.’

Dora had become most attentive. The tale seemed to be assuming very different proportions now.

‘Of course,’ she said, ‘everyone knows how Mr. Grover behaves towards Sir Philip, and I begin to be afraid he has made up this story on purpose to annoy him. It ought to be stopped.’

‘So many are saying in the town, ma’am. The family should hear of it ; that is why I was coming up to-day. But if Mr. Merivale is away, it seems to me that Sir Philip ought to be told himself, or Mr. Charles.’

Dora shook her head. ‘He is going back to Oxford to-morrow for a great examination,’ she said ; ‘he must not be troubled with such a disgraceful report ; and Sir Philip——’

She stopped, doubtful whether Sir Philip would be furiously angry, or too disdainfully



contemptuous to take the smallest trouble about it.

‘Sir Philip never wishes to hear Mr. Grover’s name mentioned,’ she continued; ‘so, unless it is really necessary, it might be better to say nothing.’

‘Indeed, ma’am, such a rumour is a serious thing: it might hurt a young gentleman’s character for years with those who do not know the family, if it is taken no notice of by them. I can’t but think Sir Philip should hear of it. A letter from him to the Compton Bank might make them take a little trouble to contradict it there; and then it would be all set straight.’

Dora seemed to see a somewhat disagreeable task rising up before her. She sat for a few moments in thought.

‘You are going to the Hanger yourself, ma’am, perhaps.’

‘Yes, I am going there now. Since you think Sir Philip ought to be told, I will tell him.’

Mr. Johnson looked much relieved. To have been forced to make the communication to the Vicar would have been disagreeable, but to have faced Sir Philip himself ten times more so. Still, he was firm in his opinion that the family should not be kept in ignorance.

Dora made a few more inquiries, but found that as Mr. Johnson had not himself seen Grover he could only bear witness to the rumours being

widely spread, with, considering the subject, a surprising unanimity in its reporters.

With many thanks and apologies the old bookseller took a respectful leave, and Dora drove on, two subjects for serious thought now claiming her attention. Extraordinary as this shameful report might be, the fact that Grover was associated with it appeared to explain its origin. It showed that there was nothing, however wild or wicked, to which he would not resort in order to give the Merivale family even a passing annoyance. A forged cheque having been presented in his name by some unknown person, he had determined to spread this scandalous story. That it should even become a few hours' wonder—that anybody should be found to repeat it—was the marvel; that they should *believe* it was, in spite of Mr. Johnson's fears, perfectly incredible! So Dora reasoned, satisfied that this was the one rational explanation; and then, the original cause of her anxiety returning in full force, she gave all her thoughts to the note which was now summoning her to the Hanger. Here indeed was real reason for a distress which she greatly feared might be deep and lasting.

She soon knew the truth, but the lips from which she learnt it were able to draw away half its bitterness. So gently and gradually was the doctor's opinion made known to her by Lady

Merivale herself, that Dora's mind received it with scarcely a shock ; it was rather implied than spoken, and many hours of subsequent reflection were necessary before she could really take it in all its bearings. In that quiet room, in sight of that happy, peaceful face, wild feeling or loud sorrow would have seemed as much out of place as in the presence of an angel from heaven. Besides, all was uncertain. There had been no sudden change, only some additional weakness. They had long known that great care was needed, and this care might surely restore her to her former condition. But when Dora, with youthful hopefulness, urged this view, Lady Merivale's smile, though full of loving gratitude, had no shadow of assent in it.

‘All will be well,’ she said. ‘God only knows when the time will be,—or how. But remember, dearest, if the summons is a sudden one, that I have lived so long in the borderland, it has no terrors for me. Thank God!’

‘For you, Aunt Eleanor, no ; but to us?’

‘My child ! He knows how gladly I would stay with you all a little longer, and it may be so. I may still see——’

Lady Merivale broke off. The thought of her absent son was the only one she could not face with calmness. Of the rest she could speak with perfect tranquillity. First, of her three daughters, and of what she would wish to be

written to all, an anxiety to spare their feelings and to prepare them gradually for the whole truth being uppermost in each case. She then spoke of her husband. 'He was with me this morning,' she said; 'we were alone together. Dearest Philip! he feels it only too much.'

She ceased, and lay quietly thinking. Neither to Dora, nor to any living being, could she express how her husband's unwonted alarm and tenderness had called back to her memory with a strange happiness the early days of their married life. 'He wished to see you before you went back,' she said presently, rousing herself. 'It is to ask you about coming here if you can, if it is possible, now Charlie must leave us for Oxford—if you will all come, or you alone. The doctor wishes for someone, and I need not say'—with a very bright smile—'how I wish for you.'

'Dearest Aunt Eleanor, yes! I will come to-morrow: Charlie goes to-morrow?'

'Yes, poor boy! When I think of all the hard work before him, I cannot help grieving that he should have this trouble to take back with him. He looks so pale! He came to me early this morning, and I could see how little he had slept.'

Dora was silent. Charlie's name brought back the story which, since entering Lady Merivale's room, had been entirely banished from her

mind. The deep emotion of this afternoon made it seem, now that it returned upon her, most inopportune and wearisome. Yet her word, pledged to Mr. Johnson, must be kept, and when a message was brought from Sir Philip, begging that she would come to him before leaving the house, she at once bade Lady Merivale good-bye, and went down to the library.

Sir Philip was sitting alone by the fire in the library. He rose the moment she entered.

‘Dora, how do you think her?’

The voice was sharp with anxiety, and the face corresponded to it. The distressed, almost distracted, countenance did not look like his own, and the tears which had been repressed upstairs rushed to Dora’s eyes.

‘I don’t know,’ she said falteringly, ‘I could not have told she was worse.’

‘You could not?’

‘No, she seems just as usual.’

He turned away with an impatient gesture. ‘Of course!’ he cried. ‘I said so! I knew it was madness; it’s their trade to frighten people—couldn’t he have known that? An idle panic! A man should be above such things!’

He seemed to be speaking more to himself than to her, and the angry, petulant tone to which his voice had changed astonished her. Before she could speak, however, he had turned

back, and, taking her hand with a totally different air, he began again.

‘My dear, I am going to ask a favour of you ; she must not be alone, so Dr. Arthur says : will you come to us ? She is fond of you. She would rather have you than anyone.’

‘Oh, yes ! Most certainly I will come !’

‘That’s right. Come to-morrow, and bring Miss Goode and the children back again if you will ; settle it just as you please.’

He sank back and seemed lost in abstraction, gazing at the fire, then started and looked round. ‘What ? You said you would come, didn’t you ?’

‘Yes, I did.’

‘That’s right ; she’s fond of you.’ Again he relapsed into silence.

Dora had never seen him in such a mood. He looked strangely aged and broken. When she thought of the only cause to which it could be attributed, a tenderer feeling than she had ever yet known for Sir Philip came over her. She drew nearer, grieving in her heart that she should have to say what must vex him at such a moment, yet recalling Mr. Johnson’s words, and for Charlie’s sake not daring to be silent.

‘Have you heard,’ she said hesitatingly, ‘that there is a story in Arnborough about a forgery on the Compton Bank ?’

‘What ? What ?’

Sir Philip started forward in his chair with



a keenness of interest for which she had not been prepared.

‘It is such a strange story,’ she went on, crimsoning with the effort of speaking. ‘It was a cheque of Grover’s that was forged, and I am afraid, from what I have heard, that he’s trying to make use of it to be an annoyance here.’

‘What does he say?’

Dora tried to laugh, but the sound died on her lips. ‘It’s too absurd—nobody would listen to it for a moment; it only shows the sort of man he is; but he says—that—Charlie did it!’

‘He dares!’ Sir Philip’s eyes were glaring.

‘They say so. They say everyone in Arnborough is speaking of it, and that it should be stopped.’

‘In Arnborough! Oh, my God!’ Sir Philip sank back in his chair with a groan, and covered his face.

‘But it can’t hurt him; it cannot matter!’ she cried. ‘How could it? Only it must be stopped quickly.’

‘How? How? If that villain’—and Sir Philip’s hand fell with a heavy blow on the arm of his chair—‘chooses to lie about us, who is to stop him now?’

‘But it *must* be stopped! Mr. Johnson was coming to Hurst about it just now. He said it ought not to go on uncontradicted; he asked me

to tell you. He thought you would go to the Bank and get them to deny it.'

Sir Philip rose in violent agitation. 'It is too late,' he cried. 'It cannot be done! I desire to hear nothing of it! I was not asked—I was not consulted—I will not go to Compton—I will not hear my name dragged through the mire; I——'

He turned and hurried from the room, leaving Dora motionless with astonishment. What could have caused such strange, wild words? Annoying as the intelligence might be, she had seen nothing in it to occasion this burst of despair. Nor could she understand Sir Philip's language. Had he heard it before? Was there more to hear than she had been told? Yet as the falsehood of the story was absolutely certain, how could there be any real ground for distress?

She desired to see Charlie himself, and sought him in the little study where he was accustomed to read. Books lay open on the table, but the room was empty; and, on making inquiries of a servant, she heard that he had been seen to leave the house a quarter of an hour ago. The afternoon was beginning to close in; she had driven over alone, and must not delay her return. Still she waited a few minutes, but he did not appear, and she drove away at last, her heart heavy with sorrow on Lady Merivale's behalf, and with strange perplexity in regard to

Sir Philip. That Charlie, too, should not have waited to see her and wish her good-bye was most unusual, especially when there was so much to say respecting Dr. Arthur's visit. But as she drove down the avenue, revolving these things in her mind, she soon discerned a figure leaning against one of the trees, and gladly drew the pony's reins.

'Oh, Charlie!' she cried, 'I have so wanted to see you! Get in, and drive with me a little way.'

He came forward, but merely stood by the pony, leaning one arm across its back.

'I cannot; I am going to my mother. You have been with her.'

'Yes.' His tone alone would have told her some great change had taken place, and when she looked in his face, she saw that it was deadly pale.

'Dearest Charlie,' she said earnestly, holding out her hand, 'you must not take it too much to heart. Doctors are often mistaken: we will hope and trust.'

He looked away without a shadow of response.

'Aunt Eleanor told me she knew how you were grieving,' Dora continued. 'She is so sorry—we must all be so sorry—you should have to go up to Oxford now in such anxiety. Though when I look at her I cannot think—I

cannot believe—there is any immediate cause for it ; and care can do so much.’

‘ You are coming here ? ’ he said abruptly, again turning towards her.

‘ Yes ; to-morrow. We had better all come, I think.’

‘ Then listen.’ Word for word he repeated Dr. Arthur’s instructions as to the absolute importance of mental quiet. ‘ Now will you promise to take care of this ? ’ he demanded.

‘ As far as possible—of course I will.’

‘ It must be possible ! She must hear *nothing* ! Promise,’ he repeated half sternly.

‘ Certainly,’ she said, surprised. ‘ I will do all I can—you know I will. We have always watched the papers very carefully ; but if bad news came, how could I hide it ? ’

‘ It’s not that—I don’t mean that. If any other things are said at home—any stories that could give her pain—*don’t let her hear them*.’

‘ Charlie ! Then you know——’

‘ Know what ? ’

The colour rushed to her face, yet she dared not be silent.

‘ The story there is in Arnborough—about the cheque.’

‘ In Arnborough ! Is it there ? ’

‘ Yes ; I heard it to-day. Oh, Charlie ! do you know it—have you heard it—what Grover says ? ’

‘I know it—yes.’

‘But could you have believed any man would be so wicked as to set such a thing about?—or so mad, as if anyone would ever believe it? Of course I will never let Aunt Eleanor hear a word of it; but you’—she tried hard to read his averted face—‘you won’t let it vex you, will you? That bad man’s stories can be of no consequence to you.’

‘*She* would not think so.’

‘Aunt Eleanor? Ah! no. And it would shock her that any man could tell such a wicked falsehood.’

‘It is a falsehood; yet he thinks it true.’

‘Impossible! He cannot!’

‘He does. I met him this morning. He said so!’

‘You met him! Then that is how you know it! But I don’t believe he thinks it; he says it because he wants to annoy this family. It should be stopped at once. Mr. Johnson met me just now, and said so; he had been coming up to see Uncle John. He begged me to speak to Sir Philip.’

‘My father!’ Charlie turned round quickly. ‘And did you?’

‘Yes; but he knew it—you must have told him?’

Charlie turned away again with a gesture of assent.

‘I thought he minded it too much—far too much! He could not speak of it; he went away at once. He is in such trouble about Aunt Eleanor—that has upset him, I am sure, and makes every other annoyance seem worse. But if he does nothing, will you not stop it yourself? Go to the Bank, and get them to deny it in a regular manner.’

‘I can do nothing now.’

‘Because you are going away? But you can write—write from Oxford. Oh, Charlie! do not put it off—do not neglect it!’

‘You don’t understand’—he began; then checked himself.

‘What don’t I understand?’

‘That there is nothing to be said or done now. Don’t speak of it to my father—it would be useless; and my mother—take care of her above all things! But you will, I know—or I could never go away! I must go in now. Good-bye.’

He grasped her hand for a moment. She would still have detained him, but he turned at once and walked rapidly away across the park.



## CHAPTER XI.

A small unsightly root,  
But of divine effect, he culled me out ;  
The leaf was darkish, and had prickles on it,  
But in another country, as he said,  
Bore a bright golden flower, but not in this soil.

MILTON'S *Comus*.

As Charles Merivale was crossing his college quadrangle one afternoon soon after his return to Oxford, he was met by his scout with the information that a gentleman was waiting to see him in his rooms.

‘What gentleman?’

‘Gentleman from the country, sir—grey hair—might be your father pr’aps, sir ; very like you—very like, indeed, sir.’

Charlie, hurrying up the staircase, found his hand grasped as he expected in that of Uncle John. The communicative scout was not altogether wrong. The grey-haired gentleman might well have been his father from the look with which he now scanned the face before him.

‘Well, my boy,’ he said, letting go the hand at last, ‘so here I am ; got home last night, and thought I would take a run up here to see how you are before settling down.’

Charlie began at once to press hospitalities on his uncle, and, when these were declined, to inquire about his journey, though there was little new to hear. That Emmeline's desire for going to the Crimea had rapidly diminished on approaching Marseilles, and had finally turned into a resolution to join the Campbells at Nice, was already known to her family at home. The Vicar, not feeling bound to accompany his niece on a tour of pleasure along the Mediterranean coast, had only remained long enough to find her a suitable escort from Marseilles before returning home himself.

'She said she should be all the way nearer to poor dear Frank,' he remarked dryly, 'in case she heard he really wanted her. Well, Di will keep her, I dare say, and she's not needed at home just now; though I don't know how she will feel when she hears—— Ah, my poor dear children, how much you have gone through!' He shook his head sadly.

'You have heard about mamma,' said Charlie in a low voice.

'Yes—yes. Dora sent a note to Paris which prepared me, and I heard all last night. We must not grieve for her, my boy. If ever there was an angel in Heaven's keeping—she is one! She spoke to me last night; she asked me to guide her, when she is fitter to teach me—a thousand times!' He paused, unable to speak

for a minute or two, then went on: 'But, Charlie, it is another matter that has brought me up here to-day. Dora has told me an extraordinary story, so far as she knows it, about this cheque. But she cannot make it out, nor can I, and as it is impossible to have a day's peace without hearing the whole, here I am. Why did you not tell her more? Why did you not answer the letter she wrote to you about it, the day after you went back?'

'There was nothing to tell,' was the husky answer. 'I don't know who forged the cheque.'

'Of course not. But how is it possible Grover can have had any handle to fasten it upon you? And who can have had a letter of yours in his possession? Above all, why should you have taken no notice of it? Why not write to the Compton Bank to tell them of that man's shameful libel, that they may take some steps to stop his mouth?' The Vicar poured out his questions with eager haste. Charlie passed by all in silence, excepting the last.

'I cannot—it cannot be stopped now.' He rested his head against the mantelpiece with a bitter sigh of despair.

His uncle rose to lay a hand on his shoulder. 'My boy, are you in trouble? Tell me what it is.'

Even though the trouble was a hopeless one, that kind touch and yet kinder tone brought

the first ray of comfort that Charlie had known for days. The sigh with which he turned round was one of mingled pain and relief.

‘I will tell you,’ he said. ‘If you had been at home I must have told you long ago, though it would have been of no use. I must have done it all the same, and I must have done it alone.’

‘Done it? Good heavens! what have you done? Tell me at once!’

He did tell him. Seated opposite to his uncle, his forehead propped upon his hands, his eyes downcast, he went through the whole story from Mr. Mason’s visit to the moment when he himself quitted the partners’ presence. Excepting by a few deep breaths and involuntary exclamations, the Vicar scarcely interrupted him with a word. When Charlie ceased there was still silence for a minute or two.

‘You did this,’ said his uncle at last, ‘in spite of all that might be said and thought of you in consequence! Did you think—did you foresee how it would be?’

‘I knew what Mr. Mason and the others would believe, of course. I couldn’t think of much beyond.’

‘Why should you not have spoken more openly to them?’

‘No,’ said Charlie impetuously. ‘How could I speak to those men of my mother? I could

never have done it ; and they would never have believed me. They would have believed I was using her name as a shield, a pretence for accepting their offer, and looked on me as a hypocrite as well as a——’ He broke off and walked to the window, struggling for calmness. ‘Uncle John,’ he said in a trembling voice, ‘*was* I wrong? It was her life I had to think of;—it couldn’t have been wrong after all, could it?’

For answer he felt his uncle’s arm thrown round him with a long and strong pressure. ‘I’m not going to blame you, my boy,’ he said fervently. ‘Good heavens, no!—nor to praise you either. There are some deeds whose praise is not of men. You have chosen a hard path ; God Almighty bless you, and help you along it!’

Charlie bowed his head in silence.

‘It will be a hard one—harder than you thought at first.’

‘I know it. And though you do not blame me, my father does.’

‘Ah ! you told him?’

‘Yes, that same day.’

‘And how did he take it?’

‘That was the worst of all. He could not see that it was necessary.’

‘Ah ! Philip must have been tried—I can believe that—but we must see ! We must speak of it when I get home.’

The Vicar sank into thought ; then, rousing himself, fixed his eyes on the face before him.

‘How do you sleep, my dear boy?’

‘Not very well.’

‘So I should suppose. And how does your head stand the work?’

‘Oh, I don’t know! Don’t let them expect anything at home, that’s all. I shall be sure to come to awful grief! Get ploughed most likely.’

‘Ploughed? Nonsense. Take all the rest you can possibly get, and put all this concern out of your mind as much as possible.’

‘How can it be possible?’

‘Well, well ; do your best. Your duty now is think of your work till the examination is over, as far as may be ; and, though I couldn’t rest without coming up to see you, I shall say no more now. I know the truth, and that is enough. I must go home and think it over. Don’t lose heart and hope, my boy ; you acted for the best at a very difficult moment, and God will make it turn out for the best in the end, though we may not see how just yet. He never forsakes nor mistakes : trust to that—believe that.’

‘I do believe it, only I cannot always feel it.’

‘Nor anyone else! But we can hold to our faith whatever comes. Only one thing—why did you not tell Dora? Why should you have left her in such ignorance and doubt?’

‘Doubt! Did she think——?’ He stopped.



‘She thinks no harm of you, you may be sure of that! But remember how you left her. She understood nothing clearly; there was not a creature she could ask; and, with all her anxiety on your mother’s account, it was hard to leave her without telling the whole. She says, too, that she has written to you, entreating you to tell her more, and that you have taken no notice.’

Charlie looked down. ‘No; I thought I had better bear it alone.’

‘Pride was misplaced there,’ returned the Vicar.

‘It was not pride. But I could not speak.’

‘Well, it was a painful moment. But it has been hard upon her; and it is for her sake, as much as anything, that I want to get back to-night. Any message?’

‘Nothing but my love to everyone.’

Considering how much the one he had left had been suffering, Uncle John thought the message might have been longer; but it would have been cruel to be critical at a moment when Charlie’s face showed that all speech was difficult to him.

It was late when the Vicar reached the Hanger that night, but Dora was waiting, too anxious and unhappy to think of sleep until she had seen him. With breathless interest she listened to his story, and when at last she rose to thank him for it with a kiss, her face was

covered with tears. 'He is a hero,' was all she could whisper.

'That he is,' said the Vicar. 'England may have many—but none braver than he.'

To speak with his brother on all that had passed was naturally Mr. Merivale's first business on the following morning. The account which Dora had previously given him of her own attempt to do so, and its failure, had assisted his resolution to repair to Oxford and learn the real truth without delay from Charlie's own lips. Now it would be only right that Charlie's father should be consulted respecting any plan the Vicar might be able to devise as a way out of their present difficulties. Duty, however, rather than hope of assistance, made him turn his steps towards the library. Had he indulged in any such hope it would soon have been disappointed. Sir Philip's anger indeed had to a great extent passed away, but despair had taken its place. Charlie, he said, had run his head against a wall. No one would believe a word they might say without proof. Unless the real culprit could be found, people would go on repeating and believing what they pleased. It was no one's interest to search for him except their own, and they had no means of doing so. Such were his convictions, while he entreated, almost piteously, to be spared the discussion of so miserable a subject. John might act as he pleased. For

himself, he had enough of other matters to distress him.

The same nature which had led Sir Philip to close his eyes to the true state of his wife's health, because it was inconvenient to acknowledge it, now made him turn involuntarily from a subject intolerably hateful to his wounded pride. Poor Sir Philip felt indeed at this time as though all things had conspired against him; the autocracy of a lifetime seemed to be breaking down. He went about with a dazed, bewildered look, seldom stirring beyond the park gates; shrinking from every fresh face, scarcely willing to speak even upon ordinary business to his tenants or his agent. Learning is hard work when there are grey hairs on the head, and habits of thought more than half a century old to be rubbed out of the mind. Yet Sir Philip was learning. In spite of that lost helpless look, his eyes were opening somewhat farther than had ever been their wont before; he was taking in truths about his wife, her value, and his own position and duties towards her, which had never been perceived till now. His attempts to minister to her comfort, awkward though they often were, his nervous hurry and trembling fingers, inspired a respect and regard in some of the hearts around him which the old self-engrossed importance and grandiloquent phrases had never been able to produce. Assistance or counsel;

however, in unravelling the mystery of the cheque he was quite unable to give.

That justice was always to be had in England was, of course, an important part of the Vicar's patriotic political creed. Reflection, however, showed him that this fact, which he would have been most indignant to have heard called a fiction, applied to legal matters only. Social injustice can no more be restrained by law than domestic tyranny by national freedom. To the law it was known that no appeal would in this case be made. The question was, how would it be possible to prevent people from believing it likely, even in the most remote degree, that his nephew had forged the cheque; and the more he meditated, the harder this question seemed to become. They had no counter-proof to offer, and the probabilities of the case would be thought by other people to lie on this side or on that, according to their own prejudices, dispositions, or previous acquaintance with Charlie himself. Here the Vicar could not but acknowledge sadly the harm that his brother's exclusiveness and slight popularity in the neighbourhood was likely to produce. At Oxford he felt sure no one would have believed the story for a moment; round his own home Charlie was neither well nor widely known, but would be remembered chiefly as one of a family who had always held themselves proudly above the

general world; and the world must change its character before it will refuse to entertain with great readiness any rumour of possible disgrace befalling those who have repeatedly hurt its own feelings.

Mr. Merivale himself, indeed, had always been pointedly excluded from the verdicts long since freely uttered on the Merivale family and the Merivale pride, and, had it been any but a family affair, his testimony in favour of an accused person would have been readily received. This he felt; but felt also that the fact of his being Charlie's uncle would make his words now almost worthless; for how could an uncle be believed to be an impartial witness? His conferences with Mr. Johnson, through whom he heard whatever was said in Arnborough on the subject, were far from consolatory. The story was still in every mouth—gathering strength in many minds from the total silence preserved both at the Bank and at the Hanger.

The total silence preserved towards himself on the subject by every friend he met did not tend to make the Vicar's mind easy. Such a silence might spring from delicacy, but it might also be prompted by a very different feeling. Day and night he revolved the question in his own mind—how was Charlie's innocence to be proved to all the world? Till some proof were forthcoming he too would keep silence, for what

could mere assertion effect? Dora's mind was similarly and not less constantly employed.

‘Uncle John,’ she said one day, ‘we ought to advertise for Tom Barnes.’

‘Tom Barnes!—what for?’

‘Because he knows about Grover's ways, and his customers; he might help us.’

‘A good idea! Why didn't I have it myself!’

‘He might know if there were anyone likely to do such a thing, who knew Grover's writing well, or anyone answering to the description of the man, who had ever been about the place.’

‘My dear, you have the most sense of the party! Grover had a nephew, I know—a great scamp he was from all I can hear; he got into some scrape in the town and vanished, no one knows where; if Grover does, he won't tell. One doesn't want to accuse anyone, but I should like to know more of that fellow. If we could only get hold of Tom, he might give a guess as to where he would be found.’

‘If we could only guess where Tom might be found himself! But we must try, and put it into American papers as well as English ones; he used often to say he would go to America some day: he may be there now.’

‘I'll do it. We will draw up an advertisement to-night.’

It was done; and the sense that something, with however remote a chance of success, had



been attempted, was a satisfaction, and gave Dora fresh spirit to perform a task from which she had shrunk, and to write an account of the whole to Harold, not without many wishes that he had himself been with them to help in their search, little although there seemed to be for anyone to do.

## CHAPTER XII.

He who filches from me my good name,  
Steals that from me which not enriches him,  
And makes me poor indeed.—OTHELLO.

THE two households of the Grange and Hanger were now one, bound together by a triple anxiety—for to its two causes at home was soon added a third, not less overpowering or distressing than either. The tidings of the battle of Inkerman were flashed through the land; the peals of joy and triumph died away, and once more the hush and horrible tension of waiting for the list of those whose lives had bought the victory fell upon England from shore to shore. It was impossible to keep the news of the battle from Lady Merivale, and the anxiety with which all around her watched for its effect on her health was so great as almost to make them forget other troubles. Such a distraction of thought, as well as that merciful dispensation by which dull use deadens repeated shocks, which might otherwise prove too hard to bear, caused this second period of waiting to be endured by all now gathered together beneath the Hanger

roof with far more outward calmness than had been the case with the previous one. They said little of their fears to each other, and got through each day's duties much as usual, though it was with absent looks and unsmiling lips.

The Vicar, who went over to Hurst daily, was the only one who brought them news from the world which lay outside the park gates. Sir Philip never went beyond them; his former journeys to London were discontinued, and Charlie, now at home again, was almost as stationary. It was not the old Charlie they had among them, but a grave, self-contained man, silent and sad, whose sole interest seemed to consist in attending to his invalid mother, by whose side most of his time was spent. To Dora it was plain that he desired to make no confidences, nor to hear any remarks on the subject of the cheque. The only time she had approached the subject, longing to assure him of her sympathy and admiration, he had risen and, scarcely answering, had left the room at once. This was very unlike Charlie—her second brother—the open-hearted Charlie, accustomed to turn to her in every joy and every trouble; and his strange unusual reserve brought an additional pang to a heart that was sad enough already.

His return gave her more hours of freedom, and she spent them on many an afternoon in pacing up and down a high hill-walk above the

house, her face turned to the autumnal sunset, her thoughts fixed on a distant shore. One day her uncle and Charlie came upon her in this walk, in earnest conversation with the keeper, Robins. She turned as they approached.

‘Uncle John, have you heard? That poor old man is dead.’

‘What poor old man?’

‘Tom’s uncle—old Matthews! Such a miserable death!’

‘No! How was it? Not murdered for his money?’

‘Drowned, sir—drowned, Mr. Charlie,’ said Robins impressively, touching his hat in the background. ‘Drowned himself—and I found him.’

‘Drowned himself on purpose?’

‘No, sir; bless you, no! He wasn’t never known to throw away nothing, if it wasn’t but the vally of a rotten potato; and it stands to reason he wouldn’t begin with his own life—that’s what I said to my missus, but now. Poor old gentleman.’

Death is a sudden sanctifier. ‘An old skin-flint!’ had been Robins’ most complimentary title while Matthews was alive.

In answer to the Vicar’s questions he now repeated his tale. Crossing some lonely meadows that morning he had come upon the body of the old man—lying half in, half out,

of a small stream, his face in the water—completely dead, and so cold and stiff as to show he must have lain thus many hours—probably all night.

‘But did no one miss him?’ asked the Vicar.

‘Why no, sir; who should? He hasn’t had a creetur in his house since that old servant of his died.’

‘But what could have taken him to the stream at all?’

‘He was always there, a-peering about after them nasty watercreeses. I’ve seen him myself, times and times; and whether he had a fit and fell all unknowing-like, or whether his foot slipped and he fell, and couldn’t lift hisself up again, that’s what we shan’t none of us ever know in this world.’

‘What a miserable death!’ said Charlie.

‘You may say that, sir—and life too! Never did a good turn to a living soul—not even to hisself, as one may say. And his clothes—there’s not a poor body in the parish would give you a thank-you for them. He that might have eat off gold, too, as I’ve heerd tell, to get his death by groping after green-meat like a dumb beast! Why, ’tis better nor any sarmon, so ’tis!—asking your pardon all the same, sir,’ added Robins, with a sudden apologetic touch of his hat in the direction of the Vicar.

The latter nodded in grave but cordial agree-

ment. 'Right, Robins; preach yourself your own sermons: they will do you as much good as any of mine. Well, we know where it is said that the love of money is the root of all evil, and here we see its truth. Poor miserable old man; more miserable because he has not left a single creature to miss or mourn him than because he has died in a ditch like a dog at last! Where did you say the body was lying?'

'In an outhouse at Stafford's, sir. Would you please to see it? The crowner was to be there presently, so I must be going along myself.'

Mr. Merivale walked away with him.

Dora and Charlie turned homewards in a silence which she was the first to break.

'Tom Barnes might be a rich man if he came back now.'

'Yes—if.'

'Will it bring him back, do you think?'

'Who can tell?—who knows where he is?'

'You know Uncle John has advertised for him?'

'Yes; he told me.'

Dora paused. If Charlie were really bent on saying nothing she must not urge him to speak; but it was hard to walk beside him with a heart aching for his suffering, and yet to show no sign of sympathy. While she hesitated, however, he began again.



‘I have just been speaking to my uncle about myself. I am going to read law.’

‘Charlie!’

‘I have written to Angus Campbell this morning to ask him about having my name put down at the Temple.’

‘Why have you done that?’

‘It is the best I can do—now.’

‘But you are to be a clergyman! You are to come to Hurst!’

‘That is all over.’

‘Oh, no, no! It will break Uncle John’s heart.’

‘I have told him. He knows it would be useless for me to think of being a clergyman here, or anywhere else, now.’

‘Oh!’ she cried, ‘don’t say so! It cannot be right.’

‘It is right. My father wishes it. If there is anything I can please him in now I ought to do it, as all the rest is over. I am not going back to the house just yet. Good-bye.’

He turned abruptly and strode away towards the woods, leaving Dora looking after him with eyes so full of tears that they could see nothing clearly. This was the worst of all! She had never foreseen it, nor dreamt that Charlie’s whole course would be changed by his present trouble. Was it possible that a baseless, slanderous story could have such power over a

life? Surely it would not be suffered to live; the truth must appear, the evil tongues be silenced. The thought of such a life as his, opening with every promise of brightness—of such a soul as his, pure, high, loving and beloved—darkened for ever in the sight of man by a deep stain of disgrace, was so bitter that faith itself seemed to fail before it.

Poor Dora's tears fell very fast as she went down the hill towards the house through November's falling leaves. In vain she tried to put away her sorrow and wear a cheerful face. Resistance to sorrow seemed impossible that evening, and she escaped early to her own room after dinner, there to fling herself down on the bed to enjoy the sad comfort of an hour of lonely wretchedness. How long she had thus lain she knew not, when her ear was caught by low sounds without—by rustlings and whispers, and, as she fancied, by her own name repeated more than once. Springing up, she ran to the door. Several maids were crowding together in the passage with anxious faces.

‘What is it?’ she cried. ‘Is your mistress worse?’

‘No, ma’am; but there is a carriage—didn’t you hear it?’

‘What carriage?’

‘I don’t know, ma’am; but a gentleman has

come, and has brought a paper; he is with Sir Philip in the hall.'

'The despatches!' was all Dora could utter as she leant against the wall and gasped for breath.

'Don't go, ma'am—don't!' urged the compassionate chorus. 'Mr. Merivale will come to you.'

They spoke in vain—the next moment she had rushed to the head of the staircase. A group was collected in the hall below. Sir Philip on a chair, his face hidden; Charlie and his uncle bending over a paper they held in their hands; and another figure beside them, that of Sir Edward Anstey, a neighbour and old friend. Low murmurs and exclamations were all she could hear—too little, yet too much! Her limbs trembled—she could hardly stand, much less walk.

'Uncle John!' she cried in a voice of piteous entreaty, 'come to me—tell me!'

All but Sir Philip turned, and saw the white face and white dress glimmering in the dimness above the oak balustrade. The Vicar ran up the stairs and caught her in his arms.

'Dora, my child, he is safe—safe! God be thanked!'

'Harry—Harry safe! Ah! thank God!'

With one long sigh her head fell on her uncle's shoulder.

‘Wait a minute,’ said the Vicar, ‘she will be all right directly. There—she is better now.’

‘What is it?’ she said faintly, ‘what did you say? was it something about Harry?’

‘Yes, my darling; the despatches are come, and he is safe—more than safe. Can you walk now? That’s right; come down, and Sir Edward shall tell you himself.’

‘But—the others?’ she asked dreamily, still holding fast by her uncle’s arm—‘Phil and Frank Darrell?’

‘Alive—alive! They have been touched, both of them; but they’ll be all right soon, please Heaven. Ah! it has been awful work—awful work! God help all the broken hearts in England to-night!’ and the good Vicar groaned in the midst of his joy.

‘But Dora has not heard the great news,’ said Sir Edward below.

‘No, no; she is coming. You must tell her, Anstey—no one else—you brought it yourself.’

The old gentleman stepped forward and took both Dora’s hands in his as she came slowly down the broad shallow steps, still only half assured that all was not a dream.

She looked up in his face.

‘Is he safe? Are you sure? Do you know he is safe?’

‘He is perfectly safe and well—I give you

my word. I have come here straight from town. The news has just arrived—a most glorious victory! And whose name is among the first mentioned with the highest commendation by his general? Your brother's—Harold's—yes, indeed, I am speaking to the sister of a hero! He has distinguished himself beyond praise. I heard the despatches myself. I give you joy, my dear. You may be proud of him. All England is proud of men like him!’

Sir Edward was an old soldier, and spoke as such.

‘Oh, Uncle John,’ cried Dora, turning bewildered, ‘is it true?’

‘Yes, my dear child—yes! Harry’s a hero, every inch of him.’

‘Ah! I knew it.’

The sister’s heart found vent in tears and sobs as she threw herself into her uncle’s arms, and Sir Edward himself turned away to wipe his spectacles.

But the news he had brought was not all joyful. Both Philip Merivale and Frank Darrell were among the wounded—the latter slightly, but Phil’s wound bore the dark word, ‘Dangerous.’

Sir Philip had not looked up since he heard it. Now, however, rousing himself, he drew Dora towards him and kissed her cheek.

‘My dear,’ he said in a voice that went to

her very heart, 'I give you joy. You at least have cause to rejoice.'

She clung to him, whispering words of sympathy and hope. Sir Philip shook his head and hid his face once more.

'“Nil desperandum”—that must be our motto,' said Sir Edward. 'Keep a brave heart, my old friend, if only for his mother's sake.'

'Ah! Aunt Eleanor!' cried Dora—'poor Aunt Eleanor! What shall we do? She must not hear to-night. Let her sleep to-night.'

All were ready to agree to this; but at that moment a message came. Lady Merivale had heard that someone was below. She begged to know at once if news had come.

They looked at one another. The Vicar rose.

'I will go to her,' he said. 'Not you, Dora; no. Miss Goode is with her. I would rather go alone.'

He went, and Sir Edward continued his endeavours to play the part of comforter.

'You must remember, Merivale, that they always make the most of these things for the sake of the wounded themselves. It tells in the service. After all, it may turn out to be a trifle—some mere flesh wound. If you could see him at this moment you might laugh at your own fears.'

'I shall never see him,' groaned Sir Philip. 'Oh, why—why did we let him go?'



‘Nay; never say that. He went at the call of duty.’

‘He talked of selling out last year. Why did I not make him do it before this hateful war began? Why did I not stop him from going?’ cried the poor distracted father.

‘Because he could never have done it and held up his head again; because your son would have been disgraced; and *that* is worse than wounds—ay, or than death itself! No, my good friend, come what may, you will have nothing to regret for Phil. A brave son is his father’s glory.’

The old veteran’s martial ardour was roused; he spoke in all good faith, and neither he nor anyone else noticed a slight sound as of a retreating step behind him. All were too much absorbed in their own feelings, and in watching for the return of the Vicar, to have leisure to notice anything beyond. In a few minutes he was with them again. ‘I have told her,’ he said hurriedly, ‘as little as I could; but she will not be satisfied without seeing you yourself, Anstey. She is calm, thank God, so come up; better no one else at first.’

Sir Philip, however, insisted on leading the way, and Dora, left alone, became for the first time conscious of Charlie’s absence. Could he, too, have stolen away to his mother, and was she, a true daughter in heart, to be the only one

kept away? She sprang up eagerly, but at the same moment her eye was caught by the open door of the library. She looked in; the room was empty; but the moonlight falling through an unclosed shutter, showed her that the door at the farther end stood open, and she made her way through the long dark room to the little study beyond. There by the table sat Charlie, his arms thrown across it, his face hidden upon them. When he raised it with a start at her approach, Dora started herself, for its expression was ghastly in the dim moonlight.

‘What are you doing here?’ she said.

‘Leave me’—the dull hollow tones did not sound like his own—‘Leave me.’

‘No, Charlie.’ Sudden joy had given her strength. ‘Not now. The others have gone up to Aunt Eleanor; she has heard, and she is calm, but she will want comfort soon. We must all try to comfort her—you most of all.’

‘I!’ was the bitter answer; ‘whom can I comfort? My father grieves for Phil, but he is proud of him; of me he is ashamed! Why is his life in danger, and not mine? Dear old Phil! happy Phil!’

He hid his face again with a convulsive sob.

‘No one is ashamed of you.’ She laid one little hand upon his strong fingers, tightly clenched together in all the agony of despair. It was clasped and held as though in a vice.

‘Dora—Dora—I’m so glad about Harry; you can be happy now. You can be proud; shame will never touch your name!’

She bent down and spoke in clear soft tones: ‘Listen, Charlie. You think I am proud of Harry—I am. It is glorious to have a brave brother—that is, I shall be proud when I can remember anything more than that he is safe—safe!’ Her voice faltered for a moment. ‘But there is something else, better than being a brave soldier, harder to bear than any wounds—and that is to bear shame, to be falsely accused, to suffer for another’s sake, to do what you have done, dearest, bravest Charlie—this is the highest—Harry would say so too; it is to be really great, noble in God’s sight!’

No words answered her, but the hand which he held was drawn close, closer, till it was warm with kisses and wet with tears. Blessed tears! The ice had melted now.

‘Why did you never speak to me?’ she whispered. ‘Why would you not let me speak to you?’

‘I thought I had better bear it alone,’ was the scarcely audible murmur.

‘That was very wrong. It made me most unhappy. My poor, poor Charlie, how much you have suffered!’

‘I’ve only wished to die,’ was the dreary answer.

‘Not that!’ she said fervently. ‘It is a wrong wish—I know it is!’

‘For others, not for me.’ He raised himself and looked at her with eyes from which every ray of youth and hope seemed to have gone for ever. ‘What have I to live for?’

‘Everything—all of us—Aunt Eleanor.’

‘My mother! yes, for a little while. But then, what can I be to anyone now? All I have done has failed; it has brought disgrace on you all!’

‘No, no; God won’t let it fail!’

‘Dora, you do not know what it is to look on and on, and see that it can never be undone now, all my life long! You don’t know what it is to feel that people will never think the same of me again, not even if I lived to be quite an old man—they would always say, “There was something against him when he was young.” But if I died, they might forget!’

‘Oh, yes!’ she said, struggling to keep back her own tears; ‘I do! I do!—at least I have thought of it night and day. I never knew what injustice meant before; but I hope, I pray—God is a righteous Judge—that is what I trust to. I never felt all that the Psalms mean before; now I see how they cry out for justice—justice above everything! When it is taken away we feel what it really is—the very air we breathe; and to be accused of doing the very thing we should hate

most, that is the crown of all—the trial of trials !’

‘Yes,’ said Charlie in a low voice. ‘*It was.*’

‘Ah!—yes.’ Both sat in reverent silence, their hands clasped, the same sacred strengthening remembrances rising in the heart of each, until through the silence of the night they heard Sir Edward’s carriage rolling away. He had come and gone—and had left a changed house behind him—changed in its fears, its hopes, its joys, its sorrows. And to many another home in England that evening came the message, awful or blessed, of death or life, rapture or misery !

Sleep was slow in visiting Dora’s eyes that night ; but it came at last and held them closed so long that the first sight to meet her gaze the next morning was Miss Goode hanging over her, a paper in her hand. ‘Dora, Dora,’ she cried, ‘listen to this : “The conduct of Lieut. Vaughan, of the ——th, was beyond praise. With his regiment in a terribly crippled condition, and nearly all his senior officers killed or disabled, he at once led the attack, and was observed for hours rallying and encouraging his men with the utmost pluck and coolness, exposed constantly to a raking cross-fire, from which, however, we are glad to add this most gallant young officer escaped without a single wound.” Beyond praise,’ repeated Miss Goode in a trembling voice as she laid the paper down. ‘Beyond praise ;

and all England will read it ! My child, this day I may thank God that I have not lived entirely in vain.'

'Dear Goody ! and who ever dreamt that you had ?' cried Dora, as between tears and laughter she clasped her old friend in her arms.

But rejoice though they might and must, there was enough cause for grief to cloud over their joy ; and little cause for wonder that Harold's letter, when it came, contained far more of sorrow than of joy. Still, sad as it was, no more welcome letter had ever reached the Hanger doors, for it began by at once reassuring them on Phil's account. His wound had been caused by a bullet that had lodged in the arm ; inflammation had threatened to appear, but this had been subdued ; and though the bullet had not yet been extracted, he was doing well ; there was no fear for his life. Harold had seen him, and received his messages from home. Frank Darrell's wound was a trifle ; he would soon be about again. So far all was well ; but Harold had a personal sorrow for which this sister's heart had been grieving ever since she had read in the fatal death-roll the name of Frederick Waller, Harold's greatest, his only very great, friend. 'He was struck down close to me just before it began,' the letter said. 'I was in time to catch him as he fell, but it was over in two minutes. We charged directly

afterwards ; he had been longing to charge all day. I hardly know what happened, only we were in the thick of it for some time. If it hadn't been for you and Uncle John I could have wished a bullet would come my way, but none did. I shall never have such another friend.' This was all Harold had to say on his own share in the victory ; this was the aspect which fame, so long desired at a distance, put on for him when she became his own.

The letters which followed served only to prove how keenly the loss was felt, even amidst all the excitement of a siege. To no one but Dora would he have owned all his sorrow, nor would he in past times have opened his heart even to her. Separation, however, had begun a work which distance and danger had completed. Harry's shy, proud reserve was gone ; and never in their whole lives had the brother and sister seemed so closely united as now, when a quarter of the earth lay between them. His letters spoke also of Charlie's affair. 'Tell him,' he wrote, 'to keep up a good heart ; if the rascal who did it isn't caught before I come home, I shall never rest till we have run him to earth, he may depend on that. I'd lay ten to one it was Grover's own precious nephew ; I always knew him to be one of the biggest scamps going. Why don't you get hold of Barnes ?—he would be the fellow to help you now.' Good advice, but needless.



Before it was received a second set of advertisements had appeared in every conceivable paper, announcing the death of old Matthews, and entreating his nephew and heir to return. Time only could show whether fate would now be more favourable to their hopes, or whether Tom, though deaf to the appeals of friendship, would listen to those of self-interest. That he was the next-of-kin could not be doubted, and therefore the heir, his grandfather having died without a will. Between forty and fifty thousand pounds were waiting Tom's acceptance. No untempting bait to lure back a penniless man; it could hardly be too much to hope that the wanderer would now return.

## CHAPTER XIII.

Old age serene and bright,  
And lovely as a Lapland night.

W. WORDSWORTH.

LATE on a cold December afternoon a lady, well covered with wraps and furs, descended from an Arnborough fly at the Hanger door.

‘Tell the housemaid to get the Red room ready, Bennet;’ ‘See that the man charges you properly, Dyer,’ were her greeting to the butler and direction to the maid before she entered the house.

Dora, seated alone by the drawing-room fire, rose eagerly to receive her.

‘Oh, Di! come at last—how glad I am!’ Then—as the visitor threw back her veil—‘Frances! is it you? We did not know you were coming! Did you write? We have had no letter.’

‘It was not worth while to write,’ answered Lady Barrymore, as, with the slightest possible attempt at a kiss, she proceeded to throw off her cloak and establish herself by the fire. ‘I heard from Di yesterday that she was on the point of

starting, and the idea struck me that I should wish to meet her and Phil, so I came off at once, though I cannot say that travelling at Christmas time is what I desire in a general way.'

'And Lord Barrymore is not with you?'

'Oh, no! He proposed it, but I told him Dyer would be sufficient. Well'—and Frances cast an exploring glance round the familiar room—'how are all here?'

'Quite well—that is—Aunt Eleanor is much the same.'

'Ah, my mother; I must hear about her presently.'

Dora began offering tea to the traveller, and would have rung for it, but Lady Barrymore immediately laid her own hand on the bell, and gave her orders to the footman before continuing her remarks.

'So Di will not be here for a day or two.'

'To-night or to-morrow we suppose she will come.'

'And nothing more, of course, is known of Phil.'

'No, nothing. He was to start directly they thought he could bear the voyage.'

'Yes; I saw the letter. My father and Charlie are in the house, no doubt.'

'No; they have both gone to London for the night. Charlie wanted to see about beginning to keep his terms at the Temple.'

‘Ah! a very good plan.’ Lady Barrymore was privately reflecting on the value of a decided opinion in family matters. ‘He was contented with his second class, I suppose.’

‘Quite; he never expected more himself, nor so much at last.’

‘And why not?’ asked Frances sharply.

‘He was not feeling well when he went in.’

‘Overworked, no doubt; many are.’

Dora paused. How much there was which Frances did not know! Nothing had been written respecting the cheque to any of the three sisters. As Lady Merivale was to be kept in ignorance, it was felt that silence was best wherever it was possible; and a strong hope that all might quickly be cleared up had assisted the Vicar in deciding that his nieces need hear nothing while still away from the Hanger. But Christmas was now close at hand, and no light whatever had fallen upon the mystery. There had been no change in the quiet secluded life led by the inmates of the Hanger. Dora, indeed, had the comfort of feeling that Charlie’s confidence was not now closed against her, although by common consent they seldom spoke of a subject that would hardly bear discussion. Since it had been known that Phil was to be sent home invalided, another fear had risen in her heart. Would it be possible that he should be long in the house without hearing the story?

And now Frances had arrived the difficulty would be doubled. Her heart sank within her as she looked at Lady Barrymore's unsympathetic features.

'I do not think it was only overwork,' she answered. 'He has had a great deal on his mind; there has been so much distress and anxiety this autumn.'

'No doubt; but I do not know that young men are particularly likely to be affected by it. They think of nothing in fighting but excitement and glory.'

'I did not mean on account of the war only; but Charlie had to return for his examination just after Dr. Arthur had been here, and since his visit we have felt far more uneasy about Aunt Eleanor.'

'True; I saw the reports. I am prepared to find her requiring care and quiet.'

Lady Barrymore seldom asked for information, she generally gave it. Now, having drunk her tea, she rose, announcing her intention of visiting her mother's room.

Dora rose also.

'You will wait a minute or two till I have told her you are here?' she said.

'Quite unnecessary,' answered Lady Barrymore, as she moved towards the door, but Dora was before her.

'Indeed,' she said, 'it is most necessary.'

You do not know what care we have to take that she should never be startled, or have the smallest shock. Dr. Arthur told us that it was of the utmost consequence, and also that we should avoid telling her anything painful when we talk with her. It is of the greatest importance to remember that. I will tell her first, and will be back directly.'

She was gone before Lady Barrymore had recovered from her surprise. She turned and walked indignantly through the room. Dora's music lay on the piano, Dora's work on the table, Dora's open book on a chair—signs of her presence were all around. 'I am glad I came,' was her inward comment. 'It was high time, indeed!'

She was not the only person who thought so. Mr. Merivale had been longing to be at home again for some time past. There was much to be done at Christmas, and the two miles which lay between the Hanger and his parish were a serious inconvenience. He hailed Lady Barrymore's arrival with joy, and proposed an immediate removal, but Dora still pleaded for four-and-twenty hours' delay. She could not consent to leave the house until Di had arrived, as to leave Lady Merivale with no better guardian than her eldest daughter was not to be thought of. The very sound of Frances' voice, the mere rustle of her dress, were out of place in a sick

room. From her sister's presence there would be more to hope for. Illness was scarcely known at Barrymore Castle—Lady Barrymore did not approve of it—but Di had long been used to watch a delicate husband.

When the next afternoon brought Lady Campbell, in company with her father and Charlie, to the Hanger, this hope did not diminish. She had come from a genuine uneasiness about her mother's condition, not having, in the first instance, known anything about her eldest brother's expected return; and Dora could see at once her real anxiety to understand the true state of the case.

‘Lina is so unsatisfactory,’ was her first confidence when they retired together upstairs. ‘If I asked her questions about my mother's health, she would say first one thing and then exactly the opposite, till I really have had no patience with her.’

‘Poor Lina! How is she?’

Lady Campbell laughed. ‘Very well, indeed! She gets a little low over her “poor dear Frank” on Sundays; the rest of the week she goes about and enjoys herself immensely.’

‘But when she heard of his second wound, was she not dreadfully anxious again?’

‘Not at all. She said the surgeons had treated him so well the first time that she had perfect confidence in them now. Nobody need



make themselves unhappy about Lina! But tell me of my mother: I want to hear everything.'

Time, and the matronhood which had come upon her as the mother of four children, had done much to soften and improve Di. Her face had none of the gaunt, severe expression which was beginning to disfigure her eldest sister's handsome features; and the bright, spirited manner, though still retaining a slight touch of *brusquerie*, was neither hard nor overbearing. It was with real affection that she thanked Dora for all she had done for her mother. But the next question was alarming:

'What is the matter with Charlie? He is looking frightfully ill.'

'Do you think so?' said Dora anxiously. 'He is thin, I know.'

'That would be nothing—that might be from reading hard; but he is changed altogether—face, manner, everything: I saw it directly I met him in London. What is it?'

'He has been very unhappy—Dr. Arthur's visit made him so. This has been such a sad house; you must not wonder if we are changed.'

'Ah, well! it will be better now, we must hope. Phil's coming home will cheer my mother, and then Harold!—I have never congratulated you yet. What a hero! You should hear Malcolm telling the children about him. I had

a world of love and congratulations to give you from him and from Effie.'

'Oh, tell me about Effie! To think that I have not seen her since she was sixteen—and she is nearly nineteen now!'

'An ower true tale,' said Lady Campbell, shaking her head, 'and now my troubles begin. That old woman at Kildrummie hated me, I know, for being an Englishwoman. I am sure she has gratified her spite by giving me an heiress to bring out; and a pretty heiress too, and one who hasn't the least notion how to take care of herself.'

'I always knew she would be pretty!' cried Dora.

'Well, you will judge for yourself before long. Malcolm is so well now that we mean to come home next summer.'

Di's cheerful company was a pleasure to everybody, and a real tonic in the sick room. Dora could now return to Hurst with a much more easy mind, satisfied that Di and Charlie together would be sufficient to watch over their mother's peace and comfort, and thankful to perceive that Lady Barrymore's visits to the Oak room were never likely to be long ones.

Besides the pleasure of her youngest daughter's company there was now the daily hope of her eldest son's return to fill Lady Merivale's mind with an agitating joy. It was a hope soon

to be turned into a blissful certainty, for when Christmas came Phil—now Colonel Merivale—had already been two days in the house, with little of the invalid about him. He had recovered his looks on the voyage, so that the only visible change, beyond a thick black beard, was the right arm worn in a sling, telling of the Russian bullet which he still carried within it. Nevertheless, Phil was changed—and much for the better. He had not been in the school of hardship, danger, and suffering for nothing: his tone and manner were more simple and manly, his conversation much more of others and less of himself than before he went away. To Dora the chief charm and interest of his return must be that he had been, not five weeks ago, in Harold's company—that he could tell her how he looked, what he said, what he did. But there was another pleasure only inferior to this in seeing the ecstasy of inward joy with which Lady Merivale's eyes followed every movement of her newly recovered son. To have him there, given back to her ardent prayers from fields of danger and a bed of sickness, seemed a blessing beyond hope, almost beyond belief; and when her fond gaze rested on his face, her own countenance seemed to tell of a soul to which every earthly wish had been granted. Life and strength revived with his return. On Christmas Day she declared

herself well enough to join the family party; and for the first time for many months walked down the stairs, leaning on her soldier son, to join the others as they drew round the Christmas fire after dinner.

It was long since the Hanger hearth had been surrounded by so large and cheerful a family circle. The blaze that went roaring up the old chimney from the well-piled logs beneath seemed doubly welcome when contrasted with the bitter cold without and with Phil's tales of the wintry hardships that had begun even before he had left the Crimea; though Dora shivered in the ruddy glow as she pictured to herself the kind of Christmas which her brother must be keeping.

'Your white dress and holly wreath are very pretty,' said Di, who was observing her, 'but you should have put on something warmer to-night.'

'I always wear this on Christmas night, to please Harold.'

'When he is thousands of miles away?'

'Yes; for he will be thinking of us just as we always are.'

Lady Barrymore's short laugh might have a touch of contempt in it; Di's had not. She had been thinking of her own distant home-party with its cluster of little faces, and was quite inclined to admit that Harold's tastes deserved to be remembered.

‘Lucky fellow!’ remarked Phil. ‘I don’t know a luckier. Gets his company without purchase, of course! Four of his senior officers done for in half an hour. Cutler told me they tumbled down like ninepins! Well, he deserves it; I’m glad the luck came his way.’

Dora could not thank him. Yet Phil showed no want of feeling the next minute, when speaking of a brother officer’s death; but then he had been an intimate acquaintance, and his own junior in the service.

‘Sad thing that—very. An uncommonly fine youngster he was. Knocked over by a stray shot at the end of the day. Went through him just as it might be here—the cleanest thing I ever saw.’

‘Oh, my dear Phil, how terrible! His poor mother! I remember her before she married,’ sighed Lady Merivale.

‘Uncommonly sad; yet better after all than being half cut to pieces and carried back to die, like——’

‘Pray, my dearest Phil, do not tell us! I would so much rather not hear.’

‘Fortune of war, mother. Touch and go; that’s what it is for every one of us.’

Charlie and Dora’s eyes met in a common thought. Phil must be warned. Such tales of horror and distress were very unfit for his mother’s ear. Indeed the return of her

children, though it was impossible to regret it, brought increase of anxiety to those whose whole care had been of late to surround her with an atmosphere of peace. Even if Phil restrained his tongue in one direction, would he be equally careful in another, when he came to know the history of the cheque? It had not yet been spoken of to Frances and Di; but Phil would quickly be going out in the neighbourhood, where some rumour might possibly reach his ears; and then he would certainly speak of it to his sisters. Not even on Christmas evening could Dora keep her mind from these anxious reflections as she sat a silent member of the fire-side party.

When Lady Merivale rose, Charlie rose also.

‘Let me take you upstairs, mother,’ he said, as he went at once to her side. Dora followed them to prepare for her own homeward drive, and watched the slow progress of the mother and son across the hall, and up the old carved staircase where the lamplight from above fell on the two forms—Charlie’s high head bent down towards his mother, his arm around her, as they rested on every third or second step. At last the Oak room was reached, and Lady Merivale waited to satisfy herself that Dora’s wraps were warm enough.

‘You must not catch cold this bitter night,

my darling,' she said; 'that would be a bad end of our most happy evening. How could we have thought a little while ago what blessings this Christmas would bring us?—though to you, poor Dora, they are imperfect still. If we could only have had dear Harold with us, and Lina and Frank! War and fighting seem so especially dreadful at Christmas time, when all should be peace—heavenly peace.'

'That is the blessing you love best, Aunt Eleanor, I think. I am sure it is the one you bestow. I always feel as if this room were full of it.'

'The blessing of old age,' she answered gently. 'May you both feel it to be so, as I do, when you come to be old; and may you have as much cause for thankfulness as I have. One son given back to me; another'—she turned and kissed him fondly—'better still, never taken from me; and what this son has done for me and been to me all through this autumn only his mother knows! Good-night, my two dear children. God bless you both!'

'She knows, and she does not know,' said Dora softly, as she watched the door close behind her. 'If she could know all, Charlie, what would she not say then? Think of that; it will help you when you need help.'

'I need it now,' was the sad answer. 'I am going to tell the others. I would not speak



till to-day was over, that at least we might have our Christmas in peace.'

'When shall you tell them?'

'My sisters to-night, if I can, and Phil to-morrow.'

Their hands met in silent sympathy, and Dora turned away with a heart from which the peace of Christmas seemed already to have fled.

## CHAPTER XIV.

Beyond these voices there is peace.

TENNYSON'S *Idylls of the King*.

THE sisters were sitting together in the Hanger drawing-room on the following morning. It was fragrant with hot-house flowers and bright with sunlight and with the softer, more equable light reflected from the snowy scene without, which lay in unvarying whiteness beneath a fine frosty winter sky. All was still and brilliant in the outer world and in the handsome, home-like room within. But on the faces of its two silent occupants there was nothing to correspond with the brightness around them. Lady Barrymore, seated at work by the fire, never raised her head; her shining needle flew through the canvas with unvarying swiftness, and was drawn out with a sharp short movement at the end of every stitch, showing no pleasant frame of mind on the part of the worker. Lady Campbell, while busily filling sheets of foreign letter-paper at a distant table, paused frequently in her writing to lean back and gaze through the opposite window with a grave, preoccupied

brow. All conversation between the sisters had ceased for some time, when Di, once more raising her head, saw two figures, dark against the snow, passing the window.

‘Frances, there are Phil and Charlie!’

Lady Barrymore, without turning her head, stabbed her canvas more vehemently than before. In another minute the door was opened by their eldest brother.

‘Where’s my father?’ he demanded.

‘In the library,’ answered Di.

Colonel Merivale advanced into the room and stood looking from one to the other with a face like a thunder-cloud when a storm is coming up before the wind.

‘So,’ he said, ‘you two seem to be taking things pretty coolly. Have neither of you heard of this rascally business?’

‘You had better shut the door,’ was Lady Campbell’s answer.

‘Confound the door!’ Phil stamped back and gave it a bang that re-echoed through the house. ‘As if everyone in the place didn’t know! I suppose I am the last man in the country to hear of it?’

‘You have not been in the country three days, and Frances and I only knew it last night; so you have nothing to reproach us with.’

‘Last night—he told you last night, did he? Ah! Confound it all!’

Phil fell as he spoke into an arm-chair, jarring his wounded arm, and clenching his teeth with pain and anger.

‘Are you hurt?’ said Di, starting up.

‘Hurt! What does that signify? We are all hurt—every one of us. Don’t you see it? Can’t you feel it? Our name is brought to disgrace. Good heavens!’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Barrymore, ‘perfectly true—thanks to our youngest brother.’

The cold contemptuous hardness of the words was even more expressive than her brother’s passion.

‘For all that,’ said Di gloomily, ‘I could not have brought myself to tell him so in the way that you did last night.’

‘I am accustomed to say what I think,’ was the icy reply.

‘Say what you think now, then,’ cried Phil; ‘what must we all do to undo this cursed folly?’

‘Nothing will ever undo it,’ said Lady Barrymore, as she sat erect with gleaming eyes. ‘He has dragged down disgrace upon us all. He chose the position for himself; he refused inquiry; he accepted dishonour! It was a wicked folly! It was unpardonable! And it cannot be undone!’

‘By heavens, though, it shall be undone! What! are we to rest quietly with a stain on

our name for ever? I'd be blown from the cannon's mouth first !'

'It is a pity your brother did not feel like you,' said Frances, with a bitter laugh. 'He was not afraid of a stain, it would seem.'

'He is no brother of mine till he has cleared himself,' said Phil passionately. 'No disgraced man has a right to call himself son or brother to a Merivale. Let him find a name for himself; he has no business with ours !'

'He is *my* brother,' broke in Di. 'What are you dreaming of, Phil? If he were a real criminal you could not say more.'

'So you continue to defend him?' said Frances.

'I have not defended him; but if I did, it would be better than speaking of him in the way you do. It is not that I feel it less. Neither can he have done so; but you forget what he has suffered.'

'His suffering was his own choosing; but we who suffer just as much had no choice—no chance. The family honour was in his keeping! He threw it away !'

'If he did, it was for a cause.'

'For whomsoever, or whatsoever,' cried Lady Barrymore, her voice and her wrath rising higher and higher, 'it matters not. Nothing can excuse him, nothing can justify him; no one ought to defend him who values honour more than life.'

I have a right to speak. I have sons; and there is not one whom I would not rather see dead at my feet than know that he had disgraced himself by giving way to a cowardly fear!’

‘Cowardly fear! when he sacrificed himself to guard a mother’s life!’

‘So you believe that childish nonsense!’ sneered her sister.

‘He believed it, at any rate,’ cried Di. ‘He may have been mistaken; but which of us can say that he was? Not you, and not I.’

‘You do defend him, then!’ broke out Phil fiercely; ‘you do think it right and proper that our name should be a laughing-stock in the country; that I should be pointed at wherever I go as the brother of a forger who has been let off out of pity. Is that what you think?’

‘I think Charlie is no disgrace to you, Phil, for all your battles and your wounds! But don’t let us quarrel; there is wretchedness enough without that; let us be calm and think what can be done. Let us speak to Uncle John; he has known it, and Dora, all this time. Let us hear what they have to say.’

‘Dora!’ said Lady Barrymore, in proud disdain. ‘Dora Vaughan! She is not one of the family: why is her opinion to be asked?’

‘She has heard all, no doubt, from the beginning; and at any rate we cannot do better than talk to Uncle John.’

‘To what purpose? Of what use has he been? Why has he not come forward long ago to stop it all? Something might have been done earlier had they only condescended to let those most closely interested know, instead of keeping us purposely in the dark. My father’s conduct has been most extraordinary; but he is not himself! He is an altered, broken man. I could not understand it, but now it is plain enough; it is Charlie’s doing!’

‘Yes,’ cried Phil, with a short hard laugh, ‘and it was all on my account, they said. Anxiety for me had changed him so! He has had something else to think about besides a son who was taking care not to disgrace himself or his name!’

‘But my uncle!’ continued Lady Barrymore — ‘my uncle, who ought to have helped him, appears to have been absolutely useless. I shall certainly not pay him the compliment of consulting him now! I shall——’

She broke off. The door had opened, and Charlie was entering the room. A sudden silence prevailed as he came towards its three occupants.

‘Mr. Lister is here, Phil,’ he said. ‘I have asked him to see you when he leaves my mother.’

His brother, leaning against the mantelpiece, gazed before him without stirring, as



though he had heard nothing. Charlie turned to his eldest sister.

‘Frances, you will see him too?’

Lady Barrymore worked on without taking the smallest notice of his words.

‘Why do you want us to see him?’ said Di.

‘That he may explain why it is that my mother needs the very greatest care.’

‘That we,’ said Colonel Merivale, darting one look of contempt towards his brother, ‘may be made fools of by a doctor, because you were.’

A dark red flush mounted like lightning to Charlie’s face. ‘If you had been in my place,’ he said, ‘you would have done as I did.’

‘Should I? I think I see myself! Eating dirt to please a doctor!’

‘Phil! You would not say that if you knew and understood!’

‘I will tell you what I know. Look there!’ and, turning, Phil pointed to the coat of arms, with its proud motto, in the centre of the old carved chimneypiece. ‘Look there, I say. Those words never told a lie before!’

Charlie’s eyes rested on the carving; his breath came fast.

‘Never!’ continued Phil; ‘and now if they do, whom have we all to thank for it?’

‘If I had feared for myself—for what would be said of me,’ answered Charlie in a low voice,

‘and sacrificed *my mother*, would not that have been the deepest stain of all?’

‘Folly!’ returned Phil scornfully. ‘Folly and nonsense! You must have lost your senses before you took an old doctor’s word for gospel. If he had told you to murder or to steal, would you have done it? You threw away what you had no right to injure for a moment—the family honour. But to that you appear to have been quite indifferent.’

‘Indifferent! You think, then,’—and he looked from one to the other—‘that I did this thing easily?’

‘No,’ said Di; ‘we cannot think that. But you may have been mistaken in doing it at all. It seems to me you must have been, for it is a question we are all concerned in. As Phil says, it was an affair which affects the honour of the whole family, and you acted alone, at once, without consulting anybody.’

‘Because I was obliged to do it. I never thought it would touch anyone’s honour but my own. I believed it would rest entirely between me and the three partners at the Bank; they had promised to keep it a secret.’

‘And you were idiot enough to trust such men, and to put yourself in their power,’ said his brother, with unutterable contempt. ‘Of course they broke their word.’

‘They did not. It was Grover who spoke of it.’

The name was a firebrand to Colonel Merivale.

‘Grover,’ he cried, ‘that scoundrel—that low, abominable blackguard! To think that one of us should be at his mercy—should have truckled to *him*! But I won’t stand it! Not another day will I stand it! Other people may have lived with their mouths shut—I will not!’

‘What do you mean? What will you do?’

‘I will have no more mysteries or hiding of the truth about this house, to begin with!’

‘Phil! You must not speak to my mother!’

‘Must not! I *must* not! And who is to be judge of that? You, I suppose?’

‘No! Not I, nor you, but the doctors! Ask Dr. Arthur—speak to Mr. Lister—they will tell you. They have told us all that to agitate her is the most dangerous thing we could do.’

‘And so you do the thing that must agitate her most of all,—you bring dishonour on her name—on *our* name—and dream that she will never hear of it.’

‘I have told you,’ answered Charlie hoarsely, ‘why I did it. It was a choice of evils. She was never to know it—she never need know it, if we have but self-restraint. If it had been different—if there had been a trial, with all the suspense and uncertainty—think how she must

have suffered; but now, Phil'—his brother turned impatiently away—'Frances—Di—for her life's sake—you will be silent now!'

Lady Barrymore looked as though she were made of marble.

'I cannot attempt to follow your meaning,' she answered. 'The only question before us now is whether it is possible to take this reproach from our name and family. If your brother sees any way to accomplish this, you may be quite certain that I shall not desire to prevent him.'

Charlie gazed at her for some moments in silence. 'The only question,' he repeated in a half-audible voice; 'her *daughter* can say this! But at least'—and he turned to Phil and Di with a look that was wild in its entreaty—'you will promise to do nothing to-day—not this very day—not till you have seen my uncle and heard what he says?'

Again Frances would have spoken, but Di prevented her.

'We will not—they will not,' she said resolutely; 'they will see that this is just. Leave us now,' she added in a lower tone.

He obeyed. Out from the presence of those hard faces, from the sound of those pitiless voices, he went with a heart filled with a pain bitterer even than that which he had carried away from the Compton Bank. Stabs dealt at

home go deeper than any which can come from the hands of strangers. Worst of all was the feeling of powerlessness that for the first time rushed over his soul. Until now his sacrifice, however severe, had been successful, but with the return of his brother and sisters it seemed that the whole work was about to fail. Even if the respite of this day were gained, what was that? Would their uncle's words be of the least service? He dared not hope it. Phil's passion might possibly pass, but Frances' cold, resolute displeasure was of a sterner nature. She had never yielded her will yet, and unanswerable instinct told him she would not yield it now. Where was help to come from? From no quarter of the earth that he could see. Hope must take a higher range than that. 'God have pity on her—God help her!' was the silent cry of Charlie's agonised heart as he turned his steps towards his mother's room.

It was the usual hour for his first visit; but on entering he found her sofa vacant. Sitting down beside it, he waited, his eyes falling on all the loved familiar objects: the books, the pictures, the flowers, the work, tokens of her gentle presence, which to his troubled soul seemed to make the chamber a haven of rest. But how long would it be so? How soon would not this sacred, peaceful shrine be disturbed by rough and careless hands, and those the hands

of her own children! He covered his face in despair.

‘My dear boy, have I kept you waiting?’

She had come in from the bedroom, and was looking at him with the soft, smiling eyes, which he dearly loved.

‘Mother,’ he answered tenderly, and rising, held her fast in his arms as though he would make a shield with those strong defenders to keep all harm from touching her for ever.— ‘Mother, what can I do for you?’

‘Will you read to me first? I am a little late. I was talking to Mr. Lister; he has just gone to see one or two of the maids, and then he will like to have a few minutes with Phil and your sisters. What bright sunshine—such a beautiful St. Stephen’s Day. You will read me the Lessons.’

Charlie seated himself beside her, and took up some books.

‘Charlie,’ and she turned towards him with a bright smile, ‘do you remember when you were a little boy, how you wished that your birthday had been on St. Stephen’s Day? You thought then you would have been like him, and you wished to be like him so much.’

‘Yes, I remember.’

‘You said he was your favourite in all the Bible, because he was such a kind man, and so brave. I can see you now, in your little velvet

dress looking up with eyes full of tears. My Charlie!'—and she pressed his hand—'you have found out how to be brave and kind without being born on St. Stephen's Day.'

He tried to smile back an answer to the loving eyes; then, taking the book, he began to read.

Nothing made Lady Merivale happier than to lie with half-closed eyes, listening to her son's voice as it uttered truths which had long been the life of her soul. To-day there was that in the heart of the reader which gave fresh depth to every accent. He was thinking of one, tried to the utmost long ago, yet so comforted under his trials that they turned to brightest joy—one who, when his enemies closed in on every side, had but to lift his eyes upwards to behold an open heaven, a world of love and joy. Ah! but those were days when heaven and earth seemed very near together; when visions answered prayers, and celestial guides still lingered among men. How different did all appear to Charlie's sad heart now! Surely the earth under him was iron, the heavens over him were brass. Such was the irrepressible thought that rose as he read on, his mother's hand still lying in his.

Suddenly there was a slight movement—a faint sound beside him. His arm was around her in a moment.

'Mother! Are you ill?'



For one instant the white, transparent fingers tightened upon his ; for one instant there was a gasp, a sob, a struggle for what did not come—the breath of life, then—silence !

‘Mother ! mother ! What is it ? Tell me !’

He asked in vain, her head had sunk upon his shoulder. Charlie could neither believe nor understand. He looked round for help.

‘Elliot !’ he cried loudly—‘Elliot !’

The maid came hurrying in from the bedroom.

‘What is it, Mr. Charlie ? My Lady ill ? Faint ? Ah !’ as she bent over her with a cry of horror—‘Oh ! Mr. Charlie—oh ! my Lady—she’s gone—she’s gone !’

‘No !’ he cried passionately. ‘No ! no ! Fetch someone this moment—fetch Mr. Lister !’

She flew from the room.

‘Mother !’ he cried in many tones. ‘Mother !—mamma !’

But there was no voice, nor any that answered.

In another minute Elliot was back again, followed by Mr. Lister. ‘My dear Mr. Charlie, allow me—allow me.’ And with hands trembling from anxiety the doctor tried to relieve him of his burden.

‘Leave her !’ said Charlie fiercely, then, looking up—‘Mr. Lister, see—she’s ill—she has fainted.’

The doctor laid her gently down. Little examination was needed to confirm the truth which his practised eye had at once taken in.

‘My dear boy—my poor boy—she is—she has not—your dear mother is——’

‘What?’ groaned Charlie. ‘Not *dead*. She isn’t—don’t say it! She isn’t—she *can’t* be!’

The kind old man shook his head in sorrowful silence; then, as Elliot burst out in a violent passion of tears, he drew her away.

Once more the mother and son were left alone together—alone as they had never been before. Was it true? Was this death? He hung over her, gazing at the beloved face; then, taking her once more in his arms, softly laid her head on his shoulder. The eyes were closed, the features at rest; she seemed only in a happy sleep. He pressed her closer to him, and bent to kiss the lips which had kissed his, how few minutes ago! No feeling of separation had come as yet, but a sense of rest and of peace stole gradually over Charlie’s soul.

‘Safe—she is safe!’ he said, as he drew back to look at the face resting on his arm; then, stooping again towards it, spoke in a low murmur: ‘Mother, they wanted to tell you what would trouble you; they cannot tell you now. God has taken care of you—nothing can vex you any more. You are safe; you have flown away from all sorrow. I thought heaven was far off,

and never opened now ; but it has opened for you, and it must be very near—you are there now. Oh, mother ! Come back—only for one moment—and take me away with you ! ’

When Di, flying before the rest, reached the room, she found the two still in the same attitude—Charlie with his arms clasped around the lifeless form, his face buried in sofa-cushions beside his mother’s. He took not the least notice of his sister’s tearful efforts to rouse him, nor of the cries and exclamations soon sounding on every side, as one after another the inmates of the house pressed in, scarcely able to credit the truth of the sorrowful tidings which had flashed like lightning through the house. The sobs and wails of the women filled the air ; they fell with an unmeaning sound on the ears of that watcher by the pillow of death. The encircling arms were not moved even when the weeping crowd gave way as a tall figure, leaning on Mr. Lister’s arm, advanced slowly into the room. One glance Sir Philip gave—no more. He tottered, turned, and would have fallen helplessly but for the doctor’s support. Frances came to his side, and they took him away to his room. But Charlie stirred not for all the noise around, nor for Di’s whispered prayers that he would come away and let the chamber be cleared.

‘Mr. Lister,’ she entreated, hurrying towards him as he reappeared, ‘speak to him—take him away. He will not hear me.’

Mr. Lister came up to Charlie and laid a hand on his shoulder. ‘I have come to take you away, my dear sir. Your father wants you. You must think of him now.’

Slowly the muscles relaxed, the arms unclasped, and the form they had encircled was laid softly back. Then, with a heavy gasping sigh, Charlie rose to his feet and, all unconscious of sight or sound around, suffered Mr. Lister to lead him towards the door. There his hand was suddenly seized. ‘Charlie,’ said Phil hoarsely, ‘forgive—say that you forgive!’ But Charlie passed on, unseeing and unhearing, as Mr. Lister led him away.

## CHAPTER XV.

DEEP snow covered the earth on the morning when the 'house mother' was to be carried out from the Hanger doors and laid to rest in the breast of our great mother Earth. It had been her own wish to lie, not in the vast family vault, but beneath the turf of the little churchyard; and to some of the mourners it was no slight comfort to feel that one separate, sacred spot would be left to them in her name, to be cherished and watched over with tender faithfulness. Spring might still bring its violets, and summer its roses, to do honour to the memory of one for whom no outward type could be too fair, pure, and sweet. But no wreaths of flowers could seem more fitting adornment than those spotless snow wreaths—earth's 'saintly veil'—which would surround it first.

By noon a large company had gathered at the Hanger; for, though the invited guests were few, numbers of tenants and neighbours filled the church, anxious to show respect and affection to the memory of her who had been taken from

them. The family party itself was not large. Sir Philip walked first with his eldest son, then came Lord and Lady Barrymore, followed by Di and Charlie. As the third pair of mourners moved slowly up the church, a curiosity, too strong to be restrained even by time and place, made many eyes turn towards them, for Charles Merivale had been seen by few since the history of the cheque had become known. But all that the most eager could discover was an erect form and unmoved features, the eyes alone showing a mind wrapt far beyond the present scene. Sir Philip's face was hidden nearly the whole time, and Phil broke down utterly as the earth was cast upon his mother's coffin, but her youngest son's countenance remained calm and peaceful above the open grave. It was the countenance of a man who knew that one task of his life had been performed.

Those few friends who returned to the Hanger when all was over agreed together in undertones that Sir Philip had grown many years older in the course of the last six months. They were right; his air and bearing in the churchyard that morning had been unmistakably those of an old man. Sir Philip had passed the last few days in a state of bodily and mental prostration, leaving all arrangements to the care of others, without the least attempt to assert his own authority, and the greatest change of all was

that he appeared to have lost any desire for his eldest daughter's company, caring to have no one in his room but Charlie, whose attendance had been thus suddenly transferred from the one parent to the other. Little was said by either during the long hours they passed together. There was much to be thought over, and that of a kind which would hardly bear expression from a father to a son. The doctor's warnings, impatiently though they had formerly been received, were proved to have been founded in a just apprehension; and now that all opportunity for love and care was over, Sir Philip could not but feel three months of distress and alarm to have been but a poor atonement for many years of selfish indifference. Only one member of that household had shown true devotion and self-sacrificing love to her who had left them for ever, and to that one his father's sad heart now turned with a new strength of affection, which proved that the silent hours in his darkened room were not spent entirely in vain.

Before all the guests had left the Hanger on the afternoon of that mournful day, the Vicar of Hurst was summoned to speak to one of his own servants, sent over by Dora.

Dora, to her own unspeakable regret, had not made one of those assembled that day at the Hanger. Two days before she had broken



down; the shock of losing one who had been more like a mother than a friend, coming upon months of previous anxiety, had been more than she could bear, and Mr. Lister would not hear of her being allowed to undergo another day of fatigue and agitation. Her uncle, therefore, had left her at Hurst that morning, and was not a little surprised when the messenger put into his hand a small parcel, which he said Miss Vaughan had desired might be delivered immediately. Within it lay a letter from Harold, a piece of paper wrapped round it bearing some words in Dora's own writing: 'Read this to yourself first, *all through*. Thank God!'

Much surprised, the Vicar carried the letter to a room where he might be undisturbed, and read the following pages:—

'DEAR DORA,—Many thanks for your last. Phil ought to be with you when you get this, and will certify that I was in the land of the living not long ago. This can't go for a few days, but I will begin it now, to tell you that you have just lost me half my dinner—hard lines, too, for it was pea-soup, first-rate, and I had been eight hours in the trenches. I had just come off duty about dusk, with the three fellows I mess with now, and we had got back to our tents, when a private of the —th came up to me, asked my name, and said there was one of their men

very ill and wanting to see me, Thomas by name. I had got my boots off, and dinner was nearly ready, and I had never heard of the man, so you may suppose I wasn't going. Then the fellow pulled out something which he said he was to show me if I refused to come; and what, of all wonderful things, do you think it was? A dirty old tract, with "For the Aged" on it, and at the top, in your writing, "Dora Vaughan, Hurst Grange." Most extraordinary it looked out here, I can tell you; and you may be pleased to hear that, dirty as it was, it made me want to keep it; but the man wouldn't hear of it—he had promised to take it back whether I came or no.

‘Well, so then I had to go; and a regular bore I thought it, tramping along in the mud and the dark for half a mile, to be in at the death of some drunken old reprobate whom you had tried to reform. though not a single family of the name of Thomas could I remember at Hurst. When we reached the right tent, my guide turned half a dozen men or so out of it; and, when I went in, there was the sick man alone, lying on a mattress. I looked, but was none the wiser. He was not old, but young, fearfully thin and haggard, with shaggy black hair and beard. His eyes were shut; but when the other man gave him back the tract, and told him I was there, he opened them, looked

hard at me, and said in a hollow voice, "Yes—Harold Vaughan." I thought he was a cool hand; but as the poor fellow was evidently dying, it wasn't the time to begin teaching him manners; so I asked where he came from, and if there was anything I could do for him. Instead of answering, he took a pocket-book from under the great-coat which was folded beneath his head for a pillow, and opened it, his hands trembling all the while as though he could hardly hold it. First he put back the tract very carefully, then took out a bank-note and held it towards me. I said, "Do you come from Hurst, and is this for some friend there?" He said, "Yes, for your uncle. Tell him it is to pay for Lyddy's tombstone, from Tom Barnes."

'Almost before the words were out of his mouth I saw who it was; but never in my life did I see a fellow so changed. I was so astonished I could hardly speak. He said, "Thank you for coming, though you never liked me." (True enough too, however he knew it.) Of course I said I was very sorry for him, and so on, and asked how he came to be there. He said he had enlisted in London; but didn't seem to wish to speak of himself, besides being almost past speaking at all. Still, though keeping this money for Uncle John looked like an honesty I should never have expected of Barnes, I wasn't

very willing to take it ; the men want any extra comforts they can get from Balaclava badly enough, and this seemed almost like robbing the dying. So I told him it was a pity he should send away this money if it could be of any use to him, especially as from what I had lately heard he must have money enough in England to pay any debts he might have left a hundred times over. He didn't understand a word, having never heard from Arnborough since the day he left it. So I told him of his grandfather's death, and that the money would all be his if he were there to claim it. It seemed like mockery, I must confess, yet I thought he ought to know.

‘ He didn't seem to think much of the money, but said several times, “ Dead—I never thought he'd die; dead—that's what I shall soon be. Who'll die next? Grover? ” What made him think of that blackguard I don't know ; but it made me remember what you said in one of your letters about wanting to find Barnes, in case he could give any clue as to the real rogue ; so I thought I would tell him the whole thing, though he looked almost too ill to listen or speak. I began as briefly as possible, and at first I hoped he was taking it in and would answer ; but it was no go—the faintness came on just as I had finished. I stayed some time to see if he would revive ; but, when he did, he seemed too weak and wandering to speak intelligibly. I was wet through and

half-starved, so came off, and told them to send again if he recovered and asked for me; not that I fancy he can last many hours. He came out, they say, nearly two months ago, was wounded, got a chill, inflammation came on, and now he is sinking fast; the doctor says he has no constitution. Poor fellow! he might have soon been in a very different position, if he could have pulled through this. What will become of the money now? Go to enrich an ungrateful country, I suppose; and the beggars at home will want all they can get to pay the little bill we are running up for them out here. Well, it's a strange story and a sad one. I will keep this open, in case there is any more to add, but must turn in now. After all, I forgot to ask how he got your tract, or why he kept it so long.'

Here the letter broke off, the next entry beginning with a date two days later:—

'I said it was a strange story: I little knew how strange, and when you hear it all you will say the same. Early the next morning my servant woke me; he said the same man had come back before it was light, and had been begging him to call me for the last half-hour. Barnes was still alive, and had been wanting to see me all night. Of course I hoped he had something to say worth hearing, so I turned out and went off to him. He had had the doctor in

the night, I found, and they had gone now for Grey, who has been doing some chaplain's work out here, as I told you before. We met outside the tent, and I told him what I knew of Barnes before we went in. We found him alone; he looked even more ghastly by daylight, but there was a feverish spot on his cheeks, and his eyes were gleaming. He beckoned to me to come quite close; and when I sat down by him, said very distinctly, "I forged that cheque, no one else—tell them so." You may fancy how I felt when I heard that. Ill as he was, it would have been a pleasure to knock him out of bed. However, the man was dying, so I held my tongue.

‘He went on, “It was my own money; I’d a right to it; I never touched a penny that wasn’t my own.” I asked what he meant by that, and then in broken sentences he told me his story. Grover had refused to pay him his quarter’s salary as soon as it was due, on some pretext or other, and Barnes had knocked him down before all his men. Grover vowed he would have him up for assault, and Barnes went off in the night. He seems to have gone off partly from a belief that if he got into trouble for the assault, nobody at Hurst would speak to him again. He went to London, and got work at the Docks, but soon resolved to try and get the money Grover owed him, by writing a cheque for it himself. He said, “I thought this the best way to get it; I knew



it was mine by right." He went down to Compton in some clothes Charlie had given him some time before, which he had laid by, so did not know what might be in the pocket. They were the only decent ones he had left, I should fancy. He went back to town with the money, put by one five-pound note, which he didn't dare change for fear of its being traced to him, and spent the rest, which was gold, pretty soon, enlisted, and came out here. He had always meant to send the money to Uncle John when he thought he could change the note safely, and had kept it by him untouched.

'Grey began talking about repentance, but Barnes turned dogged, declaring he had only been taking his own, and there was no harm in that. Then I spoke out. The evening before I had only given him bare facts, but now I told him his deceit had brought suspicion and wretchedness on his best friend—for I knew what Charlie had always been to him. I could see that hit him hard: his face, which had been deadly white, flushed all over; he breathed hard, and said at last, "I knew it was wrong—I knew it—though I would never own it to myself before. If *he* has suffered, then I am punished worse than if it had come upon me. He has been better to me than anyone in this world—except one. If I had known what would happen, I would have starved ten times



over first." I write these words as well as I could make them out; he spoke with great difficulty.

'Well, to cut a long story short, he *was* penitent after that; the thought of what Charlie must have suffered seemed quite to alter and soften him. At first he thought Charlie would never forgive him, "nor anyone else at home," and said over and over, "I'd have died first, if I had known." I said I was quite sure I could promise forgiveness for him from all if he were truly repentant, and that he could prove his sorrow by letting us write down the whole story from his lips, and send it home. He did. We had to stop several times to give him wine, he was so weak; but it was done, and Grey has got it safe; he is going to give me a copy to enclose.

'When it was over, he looked up at me and whispered very faintly, "Do you think he would mind taking grandfather's money? Tell him, if he forgives me, he must—for my sake." Of course, it wasn't for me to say No, so Grey wrote down a few words saying that he left everything he possessed to Charlie. He would try to sign both papers, though we were forced to guide his hand; and then we witnessed them. Uncle John is executor; I hope he won't mind—I could think of no one else. Tom seemed much easier when all was done—in mind, poor fellow, not in body, for he was dying fast. Grey stayed with him to the very end—I was forced to go. He thanked me, and

said, "God bless you for coming." Poor Tom ! I don't deserve much blessing from him. I can't help wishing now I had done something for him long ago. Charlie won't have that to reproach himself with, at any rate. He didn't live above a couple of hours. One of the last things he did was to put his pocket-book in Grey's hands, saying, "Give it—it was all I had." He brought it to me afterwards ; but there is scarcely a thing in it, except the old tract. What a letter this is ! and I haven't time for another word ; but I wish I could see your faces when you read it. Isn't it glorious ? We can't be thankful enough that the truth is out at last. Congratulate Charlie. Love to everybody, Aunt Eleanor especially ; the best of it is that she may know all now.

‘Yours ever, H. V.’

Enclosed were three papers. One contained the more formal account of Tom Barnes' story. Another was a copy of the will by which Thomas Barnes left everything to which he as heir to his grandfather might be entitled, both in money and in land, to Charles Ernest Merivale. From the third, when opened, fell a Compton bank-note for five pounds.

The Vicar looked at them as though in a dream, then returned to the letter, dwelling again and again on its wonderful words, scarcely able to assure himself that all was real, and that the

mystery and distress which had so long surrounded them were over for ever. Could it be possible that Charlie was cleared—that Tom was the culprit? What a day, what an hour, for such news to reach the Hanger's darkened walls. Harold's 'best' could never be now. Joy and grief were struggling hard together in the Vicar's heart as he at length turned, the letter in his hand, towards his brother's room.

Sir Philip, seated alone in his chair by the fire, did not look up at the opening door; and Mr. Merivale quietly withdrew, to return in a few minutes and take a seat by his brother's side.

'Philip,' he said, 'I have news for you—news which you will rejoice to hear even on such a day as this is.'

Sir Philip turned to his brother with the dreamy look of one whose mind is too far away to take any heed of the actual present.

'It is about Charlie. It has pleased Heaven to end his great trial. We have found the real man—the man who presented the cheque. You remember Barnes—poor fellow!'

Sir Philip shook his head.

'Ah! well; you'll remember him presently—old Matthews' grandson.' And in a few words he gave a summary of Harold's letter.

Sir Philip gazed at him in mute wonder, his mind slowly awakening as he listened.

'Can this be true, John?' he asked at last.

‘Here it is in Harold’s own handwriting.’

‘And are you sure? Is Charlie’s name clear from everything?’

‘As clear as yours or mine. God be praised for all His mercies!’ was the fervent answer.

‘But does he know? Have you told him?’

‘Not yet—you must be there. Let me take you to him at once.’

Sir Philip rose in silence and followed his brother until the latter paused before the door of the Oak room. Then he shrank back.

‘Not there, John. I cannot go in there.’

‘But he is here,’ said the Vicar, softly opening the door. ‘Look!’

Charlie lay asleep on the sofa, one hand folded beneath his cheek. His uncle approached softly. Sir Philip, after a moment’s hesitation, did the same, and would have put out a hand to waken the sleeper had not his brother restrained him. Not even a condemned man need be awakened to be told that a free pardon has arrived. Sleep sets all captives free. Besides, there was a smile on the quiet face: perhaps the companionship of his dreams was better than the best they could offer him on waking.

Sir Philip drew back and sank into a chair, to be quickly lost in sad remembrances. Since the day of his wife’s death he had not entered this room. Her face, motionless on the cushions

where Charlie now lay, was the last sight he had seen there ; and feelings of acute pain overpowered him as he leant back and closed his eyes on the too familiar objects around. But the Vicar remained motionless by the sofa, while in the countenance before him he read, as in a book, a record of the past. Where was the bright face, still full of a boy's eager life and untroubled hopefulness, which Charlie used to wear? Gone—never to return. It was a man's face now. The load of care and thought which had descended on the young brow could not leave it, even in sleep. The features, while taking a firmer outline, had the indescribable look of those that have been moulded in the school of sorrow. Patient endurance and quiet resignation were written upon all.

It was a look not strange to the good pastor of his flock ; he had met with it many times and on many different faces. He knew well how it could brighten the worn countenance and dim eyes of those long tried by sickness and adversity, or light up the last hours of death-beds with a celestial glory ; but never yet had he found it in company with such youth, health, and strength. It became them well. 'The face of a Christian hero,' thought the Vicar, as he looked down upon it with love and reverence. 'My boy, God surely would never have tried you so hardly in your youth unless He

meant to fit you for good work by-and-by. "That we may comfort them that are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted." It takes a lifetime often,' thought the elder man, 'to understand the meaning of those words; but that face looks as though he had found it out already. Ah! my boy; you must come to my work after all, and comfort other hearts, for God will have taught you the way!'

Roused at last by his father's weary unconscious movements, Charlie sat up and looked round. Weary with want of rest, he had come to the familiar room nearly an hour before, and, lying down, had quickly fallen asleep. He now looked at his father and uncle with surprise, while the latter took out Harold's letter.

'I have something to read to you, my dear boy,' he said, 'are you ready to listen?'

Charlie assented.

'First I must tell you that there is news of a death—the death of an old friend.'

'Friend!' repeated Sir Philip in an indignant undertone.

'Charlie reckoned him as such, I know; and was always a good friend himself to poor Tom. Tom Barnes is dead. He has died a private soldier in the Crimea.'

'Dead!' cried Charlie, starting up. 'Dead!' He paused. The reflection of many throng-

ing feelings chased each other across his face. 'Dead—poor Tom! Then—that is over!'

His uncle looked at him earnestly. 'Yes. He is dead; but before he died he made a confession which concerns all here very deeply, and you the most of all. He confessed that the forged cheque on the Compton Bank was drawn and presented by himself alone.'

'Then I was right!' The words leaped from Charlie's mouth before he knew that he had spoken them.

'Right!' cried the other. 'What do you mean? You did not know this?'

He paused. 'No; I did not know it. But tell me—let me hear; I will tell you afterwards.'

'Yes,' said Sir Philip, 'the letter. Read it, John. Let us know the whole. Read it!'

The Vicar obeyed. With breathless attention his hearers hung upon his words as he went steadily through the whole, until the last lines were reached, when his voice grew scarcely audible. Then Charlie turned and hid his face.

Sir Philip's eyes were covered also.

For a time there was silence in the room—*her* room. To all it seemed as though an unseen presence filled it.

'Charlie,' said his uncle softly.

Charlie raised himself and turned again, the muscles of his face, so long unnaturally still, now quivering like a little child's.



‘My boy, what did you mean just now by saying that you were right? Had you any idea that this could be the case?’

He hesitated. The colour rushed to his cheek as though he himself had been the culprit.

‘Once, Uncle John,’ he answered in a low voice, and looking down, ‘I had.’

‘But you never told us. Why did you not speak?’

‘Because I did not know. Still I remembered that just possibly Archer’s letter might have been left in the pocket of a coat I gave to Tom.’

‘When? I never had the least idea you were in the habit of giving Tom clothes.’

‘No; I was not. But when old Lydia died, he came to me one day—and said I had often called him proud, and now he was going to show me how proud he was by asking for some old clothes. He wanted some black things that he might go to her funeral in mourning. He did not ask for the coat, as he had one that would do, but I took it down with the other things and left them all at his lodgings. Very likely he never put the coat on until the day that he went down to Compton; and so the letter may have been left in the pocket till then.’

‘Why did you not say so? ‘You should

have told us this,' broke from his father and uncle together.

'It could have done no good. I knew you had advertised for him, and I had tried too in Arnborough to hear anything I could; but in vain.'

'We would have tried again; we would have moved heaven and earth!' cried the Vicar impetuously. 'You should have told us!'

'I thought of it often; but I never could see that it would be right to speak. I knew nothing had been left undone to try to find him, and it was the merest suspicion. I had no proof. Besides it often seemed impossible that Tom would have done such a thing, and that I had no right even to think of it.'

'But you could have told us your thought. There could have been no harm in that.'

'No harm in a false accusation! Uncle John—I have known what it is!'

'True, my boy.' The Vicar pressed his hand. 'And it is true, too, that speaking could have made no difference. We did our best to find him as it was. It has come out in Heaven's own time, and in how wonderful a way! God bless you, my boy—my own dear boy! I can't say what I ought, nor the half of what I feel; but——'

Another strong pressure supplied the place of words. It was returned in silence. Charlie's

eyes sought his father's. Sir Philip held out his hand.

‘Father,’ he said, as he took it, ‘I have made you go through a great deal of trouble. If I was wrong, will you forgive me?’

With a sudden strange emotion his father clasped him to his heart. ‘It is I that need forgiveness,’ he said in a broken voice, ‘not you—the best, the most unselfish of sons! Charlie—your father does not deserve it; he asks it as a gift—love him, if you can, a little as you have loved her.’

‘Oh, father! I will—I do.’

‘If she could have known,’ sighed Sir Philip; ‘if she could have lived to hear it—if she could come back to learn what a son she has had!’

‘No, father—not for that. We would not have her back to suffer here!’

‘No, dear Philip.’ The Vicar laid a gentle hand upon his brother's. ‘Remember, heaven is better than earth, and God than man. Besides, which of us can say that she does not know all now?’

## CHAPTER XVI.

As the bird that bites a bee,  
And darts abroad on frantic wing,  
Tasting the honey and the sting.  
*The Angel in the House.*

‘ONE year only ; it seems like ten.’

Dora’s eyes were resting on an island of deepest blue sky, showing between the golden blossoms of the laburnum that hung over her seat in the Grange garden. On such a May morning as this, twelve months ago, had she and Harold parted. Her thoughts went back over the past year. Two only in her life had been equally eventful, that which had brought her to Hurst, and one whose joys and sorrows lay so deeply buried in her heart that even the remembrance of them was quiet now. But those of the last year rose up fresh and living before her mind as she sat musing alone. Much had gone from her since May had been here before. Harold had departed, perhaps never to return ; one of the dearest of friends had been taken from this world for ever, and, as an immediate consequence, full half of the interest of her own daily life was cut off.

In less than a fortnight after Lady Merivale's death Sir Philip and his sons had gone abroad with Lady Campbell, and the Hanger had been entirely closed, only a few foreign letters replacing the close and constant intercourse and union between the two houses. The well-known road, the path across the downs, was seldom trodden now. The Vicar could not bear to go near the place, and when Dora paid her own frequent visits to the little churchyard under the downs, it was to turn away with a sad, distant glance at the silent house and its closed windows, from which all signs of life had flown. Di had wished to take her away also, or rather would have wished it, had she not been obliged to confess it would have been extremely difficult for her to desert not only their uncle but the little Darrells. Dora refused even to listen to the idea, and Lady Campbell departed at last, declaring that Lina ought to be ashamed to make another person stay at home to take care of her own children, while she was amusing herself abroad—and so she should certainly tell her! But severer speeches than any which she was likely to hear would have had small effect upon Mrs. Darrell. Foreign life suited her exactly, and the arrival of her father and brother was indeed a happy circumstance for her. She could now transfer herself from the Campbells' villa to theirs, and could still repre-

sent herself to all her new acquaintances at Nice as a much-tried wife, ready to fly to her Frank at a moment's notice, though at present greatly needed where she was by a widowed father and a wounded brother.

It was a very different being from Lina Darrell who now sat in the early morning sunshine in the garden of Hurst Grange, one to whom nature's loveliness could bring but little joy that year. What had May's flowery train, her woodland choirs, her heavenly skies, to do with the scenes of danger, bloodshed, and death for ever haunting Dora's brain? Her mind was unable to turn for comfort to any earthly pleasures. Letters seemed all she could live upon now, and since there could be no Eastern mail in that day, the best good this brilliant day could bring her might be a possible letter from Nice.

There was one. She saw it open in her uncle's hand as he crossed the lawn towards her, and judging from his beaming face it must contain some good and unexpected news.

'Charlie is coming!' he cried; 'he will be here to-night.'

'Charlie coming home!'

'Not much of a coming home. One night only! He runs over just to see us. Here, read it yourself.'

The letter was short, written from Paris, to

which place Charlie had accompanied Phil, that the latter might consult an eminent surgeon about his arm. Sir Philip had become uneasy from the slow progress it was making, and had urged this step. But as he was equally anxious to have them back again as quickly as possible, their days in Paris, unless lengthened by the surgeon's order, would be so few that all the time Charlie could snatch for Hurst would be a single night and day. They saw the necessity of his return, and dwelt only on his goodness in coming at all.

‘Although,’ said the Vicar, with a sigh, for at least the tenth time that spring, ‘why Philip should ever have gone abroad I don’t know. Foreign parts can’t cure sick hearts. Home and occupation—that’s the way.’

But not for the first time was he reminded that Sir Philip had gone where he could have his daughters’ company, and that a mild climate had been recommended for Phil. They must trust the summer would bring all home again, now that Sir Malcolm’s health permitted his return to be thought of. It was a pleasant hope, and under the joyful prospect of Charlie’s speedy appearance all good things seemed possible once more.

That evening he came, and, delighted as his hosts were to welcome him, his arrival could not but bring back some sorrowful feelings.



The hasty departure from the Hanger that winter and Dora's own illness had precluded all meetings between her and Charlie, excepting one quarter of an hour the day before he started, nor had they then been alone. She had written him a long letter soon afterwards, and he had answered it, but although she had written again his later letters had all been addressed to their uncle. There was much to be said by both for which the present visit would be only too short, and yet, as is often the case when hearts are full, now that he had come words did not flow readily.

He looked well—far better than four months ago; but a man now, no longer a bright-faced boy. And when Dora had had time to watch him in the pauses of conversation, she saw a fixed and absent look on his countenance or a sudden upward glance of anxiety not easy to understand. He brought good news of all, the best being that Sir Malcolm had absolutely decided to return to England some time in the course of the summer. His father's movements would probably be guided by the Campbells' and by the state of Phil's arm. The Paris surgeon had spoken encouragingly; but it was possible that he might wish him to return to Paris in a month or two to put himself under his care for a time.

‘Well,’ said the Vicar in some disgust,

‘nobody can say I love London or London ways; but I should have thought they might have suited themselves with a doctor there, and not have been obliged to run after a Frenchman. And how is my little Effie? No better than a Frenchwoman by this time, I suppose?’

Charlie laughed.

‘Not altered at all; only improved. She is charming. A little Scotch harebell still.’

‘Poetical, Master Charlie? We shall have to look after you soon. Losing your heart, are you?’

Again he laughed, but Dora saw, if Uncle John did not, a conscious look in the face he turned away.

When she went upstairs that night Charlie had no sooner closed the door behind her than he turned to his uncle with an expression at once eager and constrained.

‘Uncle John,’ he said, ‘is everything right here now about—me?’

‘How can it possibly be otherwise? You cannot doubt it after all I have written to you?’

‘You have been most kind in writing, and I trusted that all was right; but I wanted to ask you myself if you are sure that everybody is satisfied now.’

‘Satisfied! I should think so,’ said his uncle emphatically. ‘You may see it for yourself if you like. There is a packet of letters in my

room from all sorts of people in the neighbourhood. I have been keeping them for your father. You shall take them back to him. What could put such a question into your mind?’

‘Nothing; I only wanted to be sure that my name was clear.’

‘Fancy his doubting it,’ said the Vicar to Dora as they paced up and down the broad garden walk the next morning before breakfast, ‘when Anstey and Falconer and all the rest of them haven’t words to say what they think of him. What can he have been thinking of?’

‘Perhaps,’ she answered, while her thoughts glanced at more than one possibility, ‘of his fitness to come here as your curate.’

‘Ah!’ and the Vicar shook his head with a sigh, ‘let him ask me if I think him fit—that’s all.’

‘Speak to him yourself, Uncle John, pray; perhaps he is waiting for it.’

‘I don’t know—I must see.’

Uncle John walked away, shaking his head, and his arms behind his back, as was his wont when deep in thought; and the next minute Charlie himself appeared returning from his early morning walk, the object of which it was easy to divine—he had been over the downs.

How natural it was to have him among them! The place seemed itself again now. How delightful it would be if some happy day should

yet dawn when they might see him on one side of the table and Harold on the other, both equally at home! Something towards the fulfilment of this bright vision might be settled even this very day, and with such a hope Dora could see her uncle carry him off after breakfast without regret.

Visitors, however, she did regret. They came early and stayed late. She could therefore hear nothing at present of what might have passed between the two, and, worse than that, she could get no time to talk to Charlie on her own account. Not till within half an hour of the time when he must leave them did he find her in the garden, free at last.

‘We have not had a moment together yet,’ he said; ‘let us go up the hill where we can be quiet.’

They turned down a shady garden path, where the gate at the end opened upon the downs rising up behind the house. Before they had gone many paces Charlie had taken her hand, pressed it, and drawn her arm within his own.

‘Thank you, dearest Dora,’ he said in a low, earnest voice, ‘for keeping it so beautifully. I was there this morning.’

‘It has been my happiness,’ she answered.

‘Yes, you were always one of her children. One of her dearest—and best.’

‘How could I be anything else?’ she said,

the tears springing to her eyes. 'She was always a mother to me. I never felt without one since I came here until now.'

'And this spring you have been all alone, excepting Uncle John!'

'Yes, alone indeed. Oh! Charlie, it is a sad, sad change; and I had so much to say to you, and you only come to go, and we have hardly had a minute together yet.'

'No—not a minute.'

'And you have scarcely written to me at all. Why did you not answer my second letter?'

'Sometimes it is better not to write.'

'Is it? Why?'

'Because one cannot say everything in a letter.'

Again she saw the look which had crossed his face the evening before. Could it be possible that he was beginning to have hopes and dreams he could tell to no one, not even to her? Such a suspicion can hardly occur to a sisterly heart without pain, if there has been perfect openness hitherto. It sent a pang through Dora's.

He said no more. They were now mounting a short steep slope of the downs; beneath them lay the village and the valley, bathed in sunshine and the first flush of spring's loveliness. At the top of the slope, on the border of the wood which crowned it, a beech tree, famous for its height

and beauty, rose above the rest. Its arms, widely outspread, let down a veil of silken green drapery, which in many places descended low enough to touch the waving grasses beneath, forming within a chamber, carpeted with moss and soft brown leaves, in whose midst the silver stem rose up fair and rounded like some cathedral column. Dora put aside one drooping bough and entered this woodland palace, a favourite haunt of more than one generation of Merivales, as a number of names and dates cut with varying degrees of childish skill on the great beech's smooth bark could testify. Fresh, and deeply cut by no feeble hand appeared the letters:—

H. V.

May, 1854.

Dora stood for a moment gazing at them. ‘He cut it the last Sunday he was at home,’ she said. ‘We came up here together. There is his room for another beneath it; the date of coming home—will that be cut—ever?’

She rested her head against the old tree, and gazed with wistful eyes down the blue valley between the drooping branches. But when she turned again towards Charlie, the expression with which he was regarding her startled her own thoughts away.

‘Dora, Uncle John asked me something this morning.’

‘Ah!’ Her face changed and brightened in a moment. ‘I think I know—I hope I do!’

‘You—*hope*! He asked if I will be his curate here by-and-by.’

‘And you will! You have said yes!’

‘Not yet.’

‘But you will! Think how happy it will make him.’

‘You wish it then?’

‘Can you ask? It is what he has always longed for, and what we used to think so certain, for you always meant to be a clergyman. Where could you be so useful, so much loved as here; or so great a comfort to him and to your father too? Oh, Charlie! come.’

She held out a hand as if to invite him, with shining eyes and mantling cheeks.

He gazed for some moments in silence. ‘Dora,’ and the voice was not like his own, ‘won’t you sit down? I have something to tell you.’

‘Effie’ flashed in a moment through Dora’s thoughts. ‘Effie and a Scotch home!’ She sighed as she seated herself on a moss-covered root. He took a place near her.

‘I could not give him a certain answer, though nearly all my life I have wished and hoped to come. But now’—his voice trembled greatly—‘it does not depend on me alone; there is another



thing, another person who must decide it. Do you not know?’

‘I—do—not—know,’ she said slowly.

‘It is you, yourself, Dora. I belong to you.’

She looked at him wonderingly. ‘Charlie! I don’t understand.’

‘Do you not? Do you not know that my life and my heart are yours? All that I am and have is yours, Dora.’

He flung himself down beside her, hiding his face.

‘Charlie! for shame!’ Hard words, but softened by the sweet voice that uttered them.

‘Why “for shame”?’ said he, raising himself to look in her eyes.

‘To say such things! You are my brother.’

‘Thank God, I am not! No! not Harold nor anyone knows what it is to love you as I do!’

‘How can you—how dare you say such things! You are my brother—my younger brother. No—I will not listen. It is nothing but a foolish dream. I must go!’

‘Dora, you *shall* hear me. I have come back to tell you. It is a dream—yes, the one dream of my life; but it is its one reality too. If this is not real, then nothing is real about me, nor has been for years. I have always loved you—who would not? I loved you years ago; you did not call it folly then!’

‘No, indeed!’

‘But it was the same love, only I did not know how great it was till I grew older. A year ago, when you were left alone, I longed to speak and tell you all my heart, that you might know there was someone left to whom you were more precious than life. It seems impossible you should not have felt it, and have seen how it was.’

‘On the contrary,’ she returned indignantly, ‘it would have been quite impossible I should have dreamt of such a thing.’

‘Then,’ he went on hurriedly, ‘last summer, I felt I must speak when I should have taken my degree. I could settle to nothing till I did. I thought about Hurst then, but I knew I could only come if *one* thing happened.’

‘No!’ she cried vehemently; ‘don’t say that!’

‘But soon——you know what happened! Everything was changed then. All my hopes were gone. I never could have offered you a disgraced name. You pitied me! Dora, you did not know what it was I had to bear.’

Her face softened.

‘You thought me cold; I did not dare to look in your eyes. You thought me silent; there was no other way. I had to keep away from you for fear I should say what no accused man has a right to say; but you would not desert

me, my angel! You came that night—do you remember?—and touched my hand. God knows what I felt; but He helped me—I did not speak! Yet I could not turn away from you any more, then. I felt that I must love as dying men love; and when my mother should not want me any longer, I meant to go quite away—not to see you again for years.'

A large tear stole down Dora's cheek.

'But now'—he came closer to her side—'that is over. My name is clear; no one speaks against it. My course will be clear, too—if you will be my wife. But if not, I can never come to Hurst.'

'Oh! Charlie,' she cried faintly, 'do not put these things together.'

'I must—they are one—I have known it a long time. My Dora! do not turn away! You have never turned away from me before. Don't break my heart now. Have we not always loved each other dearly? Love me a little more, only a little more! Not as I love you—you never can, I don't deserve that—but enough to let me belong to you, to worship you, to wait on you all my life long. Dora, think of Uncle John—think of our mother!'

'Hush!' she cried, putting her hands before her face. 'Hush! Wait!'

The torrent of his words as he poured them out had borne away all power of thought; but

in a few moments she had collected her senses again, and, putting down her hands, she spoke calmly.

‘Charlie, you have astonished me so that I could not stop you at first, and you have made it very hard for me to speak and say all I would, by bringing in other thoughts and remembrances which must always touch me—always be dear. But this is mere madness. No!’—as he would have interrupted her—‘I have heard you; now hear me. Do you forget our ages, that I am three years older than you are?’

‘Not three—you are not——’

‘As good as three; and, because I am a woman, much more than three in my feelings. And it is just this that has always made us able to be what we are to each other.’

‘You are all the world to me—but being older or younger has nothing to do with it.’

‘It has,’ she said impatiently, ‘of course it has! You are a boy, I am a woman. If you have no sense for yourself I must have it for both of us. Try to forget all you have been saying as soon as possible, for it is all a mistake, and you will see that it is before long. When you get a little older, and perhaps have seen the right person and known the real thing, then’—Dora gave him a smile intended to be a gay one—‘you may come and tell me about it as much as you please.’

He looked at her with grave reproach. 'That is what you think, then?' he said.

'Yes, I think you are mistaken, and that you are too young to think of me, ever—or to think of anybody yet.'

'Am I? Should you have thought so of yourself, three years ago?'

Her eyes fell. A bright colour crept up to her cheeks. Visions of not three but more than twice three years ago, visions never to be forgotten, however long past they might be, rose to Dora's memory.

'I am a woman,' she said faintly.

'And have not men hearts? Will they not give their life to their love as truly as women can? I am not a boy. I have thought and felt in the last year more than in the ten years that went before it. I have had sorrow—then one grows quickly.'

'Yes, indeed—a sorrow not to be recovered from soon! You are living under its shadow still, and turn to me because I am bound up with that sorrow too. Don't think I scorn your love, Charhe; I prize it and would keep it always. I should be wretched if I did not. But it is not what you think it is; I understand it better, and whatever it may seem to you, I know it is really the love of a very true and dear friend.'

'True; yes, true to death!'

‘And as such it is returned, and you know it.’ She turned her lovely speaking eyes upon him in perfect sincerity and affection. ‘Be content. Let us be happy together just as we always have been.’

He shook his head. ‘Those times are over,’ he said. ‘They never can come again, for then I was what you call me now—a boy. I could almost wish it were true. No! I do not wish it! I will never wish my heart and soul to feel less, at whatever cost, than they do now. I have known sorrow; but it is not that which has made me a man, it is love of you! Joy or sorrow could never touch that. Dora, whatever you may say or think, it is for my life!’ He bent forward, his hands clasped, his eyes fastened upon her. ‘You think time will make a difference in what I feel. Time will show. For the future that lies before me now I shall know how to act. I shall make no change. I shall stay with my father; he could hardly do without me for a time. I must not think of Hurst yet. Some day, perhaps’—his voice sank to a pleading whisper—‘some day, Dora, darling, you will stretch out your hand again, and say, “Come.”’

‘You are cruel,’ she cried, ‘to urge me like that—to make it seem as though I were keeping you away from Uncle John, and from being a

clergyman. This should have nothing to do with that.'

'I should not be a clergyman in any case for the next two years, and I never can live at Hurst unless you are my wife.'

'And I shall never marry.'

'Why not?'

There was a silence—broken only by the breeze whispering overhead—by a bird singing deeper in the wood. Dora's eyes were fixed far away; there was a troubled look in them as in those of a creature suddenly brought to bay. He was reading them intently.

'Dora!'—his voice trembled so that he could hardly speak—'tell me one thing, only one thing. There is not anyone—not anyone else?'

Silence still. 'Tell me,' he urged breathlessly.

Could she say yes? could she say no? Her head drooped; the colour came again.

'Speak,' said he hoarsely.

'I shall never marry anyone. I have said it already. I have known it a long time.'

'But why? Speak—tell me. Is there any living love that comes between your heart and mine?'

He was sure the faint motion of her lips said 'No.' He caught her hand. 'It is just the same as if there were,' she said, drawing it away, 'just as impossible. I shall not change—ever.'



‘And I—never.’

‘Charlie! Dora!’ sounded up the hill, ‘where are you? The carriage will be round directly.’

Both sprang up. He seized her hand once more. ‘I must go—you know all now, my whole heart! Oh Dora, good-bye—good-bye.’

For one moment he clasped her to his heart, the next—he was gone.

## CHAPTER XVII.

‘For me,’ she stooped, and looking round,  
Plucked a blue harebell from the ground;  
‘This little flower that loves the lea,  
May well my simple emblem be.’—SIR W. SCOTT.

SUMMER had come and gone, and autumn days were beginning to grow short, when a tall, dark-haired gentleman turned in at the Grange gate on a breezy October afternoon. He had been walking slowly, looking about him like one uncertain of his way, until he had paused before a sunk fence crowned by the trimmest of low holly hedges bounding an expanse of turf which spread out like dark green velvet, touched here and there by a dash of gold leaf, stray tokens from surrounding beeches and elms, behind whose widespreading branches the dark red roof and walls of a long low house were plainly visible. This was evidently the place he had been seeking, and he took his way down the broad, smooth carriage road, which, winding round beneath the trees, led to the deep porch where Sultan lay in luxurious ease, surrounded by smaller and humbler companions. But never was a dog at Hurst Grange so ill-mannered as to

bark at the approach of any visitor who looked friendly and fit to be trusted, and now, though curly heads were raised, and bright eyes glistened, no sound of objection was heard as this one rang the bell.

‘Is Mr. Merivale at home?’ he inquired.

‘Not at home, sir.’

The gentleman consulted his watch.

‘Would he be at home, do you suppose, if I were to return in half an hour?’

‘Master is out for the night, sir.’

Still the visitor did not move. The grey-haired butler, who had admitted guests through that door for more than twenty years, felt a dim recollection come over him now as he looked at the face before him. It was strengthened by the next question.

‘Is Miss Campbell in the house?’

‘Yes, sir, she is’—then as the gentleman entering gave his name—‘thought so, sir. I thought I could not be mistaken,’ and the next moment the drawing-room door was thrown open, and ‘Mr. Campbell’ was announced.

A tall, fair-haired girl, seated at a table by the small wood fire, who had been bending busily over her painting, sprang up in joyful surprise.

‘Uncle Angus—is it you!’

The warmth of Effie’s greeting might amply atone for the want of any other.

‘Well, little one,’ said her uncle, as he returned it, ‘how’s yer ain sel?’

‘Oh, quite well; but where do you come from—London? Have you seen papa? How is he?’

‘From Scotland last night—Grosvenor Square this morning. Your father seems all right, the house is nearly right too, so far as I could see. So Mr. Merivale is out, I find. I have come down in hopes of seeing him.’

‘He has gone to the visitation and is forced to stay for the night. He is hardly ever away.’

‘Malcolm said he was a most stay-at-home person, and I should have supposed as much myself, from my remembrance of him, though it is many years since I saw him.’

So Effie would have believed, and wondered not a little why he should want to see him now.

‘Is it about anything in particular, Uncle Angus, anything that I can ask him for you?’

Her uncle looked her over with a good-humoured smile.

‘Ah, young woman, how much are you to be trusted, I wonder?’

‘Entirely,’ and Effie drew up her slender little neck with a becoming dignity, which rapidly melted into a still more becoming laugh.

‘If you have come to tell secrets, you had much better tell me than Uncle John, for he can never keep them!’

‘I have come to ask, more than to tell. Of course you have heard all about Jarvis’s sudden death?’

‘Yes. Uncle John has been thinking a great deal about it, and Dora has ridden over this afternoon to inquire and leave cards.’

‘Ah!’ Mr. Campbell paused. ‘Well, and what does Mr. Merivale say? Who is to come forward?’

‘He does not know. It was so sudden.’

‘Not altogether. Jarvis has been failing for some time. There was a talk of his retiring last year.’

‘Was there? I did not know. But Uncle John has been talking chiefly about the family and poor Mrs. Jarvis, though he did say once that of course there would be a contest for Arnborough now, and he wondered if the Conservatives had a man ready to stand.’

‘You are sure he said that?’

‘Quite sure; but why?’

‘Your father had an idea that possibly the Hanger might furnish a candidate. Has not Mr. Merivale spoken of it?’

‘No, not a word; but what did papa mean?’

‘Why not Charles Merivale?’

‘But Charlie is so young!’

‘Not too young if he is twenty-three.’

‘But he is to be a clergyman.’

‘Far from it. He is just going to begin reading law.’

‘For a little while, yes,’ said Effie reluctantly, ‘but Dora thinks—she is sure—he will be a clergyman by-and-by.’

‘And I hear,’ continued her uncle, ‘that he has just acquired some interest in Arnborough by buying land there.’

‘Oh, yes; but not for himself at all. It is that beautiful bit of common above the town, where all the people walked on Sundays, and it was to be sold and built over. Uncle John was in such distress, he wrote about it when we were in Switzerland, and Charlie wrote back at once to ask if it couldn’t be bought and kept as it was; and he is going to do it, to give three thousand pounds.’

‘Three thousand pounds—and what will he get back?’

‘Nothing, I suppose, except the pleasure of knowing that the people will keep their common.’

‘My dear child! Do you really suppose anyone would throw away money like that without an object?’

But Effie was firm in her faith. Nobody else might, but she was not the less sure about Charlie. ‘Mamma never thought he wanted to stand for Arnborough surely?’ she asked.

‘She knows nothing one way or the other. Your father was uncertain, and as the Merivales

are a scattered body at present, not one of them to be found in England excepting at Hurst, it seemed best to inquire here.'

'But why should papa want to know so much?'

'Ah, why? Supposing it was on a friend's account?'

She looked in his face and sprang up joyfully.

'Uncle Angus, it's yourself.'

'You're a witch, Effie. Ye're no just canny.'

She clapped her hands. 'Oh, how I do love to hear you talk Scotch again! And how delightful it will be to have you at Arnborough; then we shall come here all the more! Though it seems wrong to be rejoicing when that poor man is but just dead.'

'Premature, certainly. I may not get in.'

'Of course you will! But have you only just thought of it?'

'I was asked if I would think of it some time back, in case the seat were vacant; but if a son of Sir Philip wishes for it, the place, so far as I am concerned, is not vacant at all.'

'I am certain he does not. What a pity Uncle John is not at home to tell you himself.'

'Can you give me some paper and his address, that I may leave a line for him?'

Effie at once began arranging pens and paper at a pretty little writing-table. Mr. Campbell sat down and took a sheet of paper—a second



—a third, laying them all down again as the same dainty little monogram, embossed in blue, or rose, or gold, met his eye on all.

‘Not these,’ he said, ‘a plain piece.’

Effie brought one, observing that it was of no consequence, ‘Dora never minded who used her paper.’

‘No reason it should be stolen, for all that.’

He wrote for some time, enclosed and addressed his letter, and left it on the table, promising Effie that as soon as there was anything to know, she should hear it ; but meanwhile she must be bound to secrecy.

‘But I can tell Dora,’ she said, ‘can I not?’

‘Well, yes, if she will be so good as not to mention it. But I don’t suppose it can be a matter of much interest to Miss Vaughan.’

Effie dissented entirely. Dora would be greatly interested in any candidate’s name, in his own especially. ‘For of course,’ she said, ‘she remembers you so well at Glenarchie.’

‘That was so many years ago that she may very likely have forgotten me. Well,’ and he threw himself into an arm-chair and looked at his niece with a smile, ‘why don’t you ask me after your own dear Kildrummie?’

A sudden change came over Effie’s face. ‘Have you been there just now?’ she said.

‘Came up last night, and I’m half asleep still! Fifteen months more, little lady, and no more

journeys on your behalf! You must find some other guardian for self and property, and leave your old uncle in peace.'

She heaved a profound sigh. The thought of that property was as unwelcome in her twentieth as it had been in her twelfth year. In many ways Effie was much altered; not only had the pale little girl grown into a slender graceful young lady, with a certain marked and gentle dignity of her own, but the sad face had become, though still often a pensive, yet generally a happy face, for Effie's life was, on the whole, a happy one now. To the old and unchanged source of joy she possessed in her father's tender kindness had been added by degrees the new delight of becoming the willing slave and devoted worshipper of four little brothers and sisters, nor was there any cause of unhappiness between herself and her stepmother, whose substantial kindness Effie herself would have been the first to acknowledge, even though shrinking now and then from the manner in which it was shown. Di was really fond of her in her own way, and was almost as well pleased as Sir Malcolm to observe the increase of attractions, which were certainly the very reverse of her own. The pale golden hair had not darkened much, but there was often a tender wild-rose tinge on Effie's cheek now, and a soft lustre in her clear grey eyes, while nature and education

had combined together to impart to everything she said or did a certain delicate and gentle grace which surrounded her with an atmosphere of peculiar refinement, as a slight and fragrant odour surrounds and completes the charm of some rare flower—unnoticed perhaps at first, but which, when once perceived, can never be dissociated from the thought of that flower again. Simple in her tastes and habits, she was—though gay and fearless when among a few trusted friends—still timid and retiring in general society, while the very thing that gave her prominence, the large fortune she must soon inherit, far from giving confidence to her manners, served rather to take from them what might have been their natural youthful ease.

She had her own thoughts and feelings on the subject of her heiress-ship, which had been greatly strengthened by certain unfortunate incidents during her life abroad. That her broad lands were her ‘*bête noir*’ was well known in the family, and an occasional teasing on the subject was all the revenge her uncle ever took on the little intruder who had turned him out of them eight years ago. During his brother’s absence on the Continent he had overlooked the property entirely himself, at no small inconvenience sometimes, in the midst of his own busy life. Effie knew that she was to be much the richer for his excellent management, and had

occasional fits of remorse at her own inability to be in the least grateful to him for the fact.

‘I wish I didn’t dislike the very name of the place so much,’ she said mournfully.

‘Dislike it! that will never do. Why, you will be “Kildrummie” yourself very shortly.’

‘But that won’t make me like it any better,’ she said simply. ‘I should be much more likely to like it if it were going to mean somebody else.’

‘Somebody else!’ returned her uncle, with a laughing glance; ‘whom else?’

‘I don’t know. It might have been papa, or yourself, you know, Uncle Angus. Oh! how I wish it were!’

He laughed lightly. The rich man, successful lawyer, and Queen’s Counsel, could afford to laugh at the remembrance of his early disappointment.

‘If you could only teach me to bear having it as well as you bore losing it years ago!’ she said.

‘Ah! it’s very sad. A most uncommon and distressing case. Six thousand a year and absolutely nothing to do with it! No wonder she wants comfort—but take courage, my dear. I dare say a comforter will appear all in good time.’

Effie neither smiled nor blushed. ‘I comforted myself for a long time,’ she answered, ‘by

hoping I could really do what Charlie proposed, and give it all back to you when I came of age; but at last papa told me that would be impossible. And you don't want it now.'

Angus raised his eyebrows. 'That young man,' he said, 'seems to have a craze for giving property away—other people's and his own too! When is he coming back to England?'

'Oh, very soon!' and Effie turned a most joyful face upon her uncle. 'For, you know, Harold—Captain Vaughan—is to be here soon; and he must be here then.'

'Why must he?'

'They are such friends. And in his last letter Charlie said he certainly meant to leave Paris before the steamer arrived, and go down to Southampton to meet him.'

'Paris—is that where he is?'

'Yes, since Homburg. When we all left Switzerland, in June, and went to Ireland, you know, he went to Homburg with Colonel Merivale, who was ordered to drink the waters, and now they have been some time in Paris for the operation to his arm. It is so nearly well that Charlie can leave him now. He will be in London in a few days' time, I expect.'

'Yes; and sooner than you think, perhaps. He must have heard of Jarvis's death, of course.'

'It will not be for that, indeed! Buying the

land had nothing to do with it. Oh! Uncle Angus, you must think well of Charlie when you know him!’

‘He was a very nice fellow as a boy; I remember that perfectly; but whether it would be thinking particularly well of him to suppose that as soon as he has money he throws it away with no definite object, may be doubtful. However, we shall see. And this wounded hero, when is he expected to arrive?’

‘The middle or the end of next week, they hope. It will be such a happiness here.’ Effie’s eyes brightened.

‘He was hit in the attack on the Redan, I think?’

‘Yes; the second attack. He was one of the first on the walls, and was wounded directly in the ankle; but he would not go back till he dropped down fainting, and then two of his men carried him down, and the Russians fired at them. The bullets even struck their clothes, yet not one hurt them; and ever since he has been in the hospital.’

‘With some fear of losing his foot, your father says.’

‘Oh, that is quite over! The accounts by one mail made poor Dora very anxious; but she is so happy now! Papa has begged them to come up to us to meet him there; he says the house will be quite ready then.’

‘Then you will have a Crimean hero as your first guest.’

‘Yes ; papa says it will be *such* an honour to have him !’

‘No doubt ! Malcolm always had a touch of scarlet fever about him. And you come up next week ? How long shall you have been here ?’

‘A month and more ; but it only seems a week. It is so delightful—just like home. This is such a happy place !’

Her eyes wandered lovingly round the room, a pleasant old-world room, brightened by many modern touches of grace and soft colour, and filled with tokens of life and occupation. Rooms, like woods, should contain a spirit ; a fair, kindly, industrious household spirit he should always be, such as had long ago made his home at Hurst Grange.

The gaze that followed Effie’s was a silent and somewhat abstracted one. Before long, Mr. Campbell rose ; he must catch a train ; and, with a polite message to the absent host and hostess, he bade his niece farewell and left her.

Not ten minutes later the door opened again and Dora entered in habit and hat.

‘Oh ! Dora ! Guess who has been here,’ was Effie’s eager greeting.

She stood a moment silent. ‘Anyone I know ?’

‘Someone you used to know quite well.’



‘Not—it cannot have been—your uncle?’

‘Yes—did you meet him?’ cried Effie.

‘I passed a gentleman on the Arnborough road; it was growing dark and I was riding fast, but as I passed he bowed, and I looked, and half fancied it must be Mr. Campbell. Yet I thought it impossible.’

‘He has been here more than half an hour. You would never guess why he came.’

‘I won’t try, then.’

‘He wanted to see Uncle John to ask him something about Arnborough. Now Dora, guess.’

‘I cannot guess.’ She turned away.

‘To ask him whether Charlie would want to stand as its Conservative candidate.’

‘Charlie! No, indeed! What a strange idea—and why? But I suppose Mr. Campbell must think of standing himself.’

‘How quickly you guess it! Much sooner than I did.’

‘Nothing else could make him come to ask such a thing, I should think. Of course you told him it was not so.’

‘I told him; but he could hardly believe me.’

‘Really?’

Effie repeated a part of their conversation. Dora listened silently. ‘He has been writing here, then,’ she said, as Effie finished, and her eyes fell on the letter lying on her own table

That was his writing—yes. It was a little altered from the days when he used to write down old Scotch songs for her, but not much. She turned from the table.

‘How soon it is to be thinking of these things,’ she said, ‘and that poor man only dead two days ago!’

‘But he does not want to speak of them, you know, and people are obliged to think of them at once, are they not?’ pleaded Effie.

‘Yes; I dare say they are.’

‘You will be very glad if he does stand, will you not?’

‘Indeed, Arnborough ought to feel itself most highly honoured at the prospect of such a member. Everyone will be glad, of course—excepting the other side.’

She gathered up whip and gauntlets and left the room. Mr. Campbell a candidate for Arnborough! How unexpected—how strange! But quickly came the remembrance that not a creature in the whole world would think it in the least strange—excepting herself.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

Whose high endeavours are an inward light  
That makes the path before him always bright;  
Who, doomed to go in company with pain,  
And fear, and bloodshed, miserable train!  
Turns his necessity to glorious gain;

This is the happy warrior; this is he  
That every man in arms should wish to be.

W. WORDSWORTH.

SCARCELY had the Arnborough world begun to inquire and conjecture who might be the candidates for its future favours, before the name of 'Mr. Campbell, the well-known barrister,' was suddenly in all men's mouths as the one certain to come forward in the Conservative interest; 'a very strong man,' as friends and foes alike declared. Little more than a week after his visit to Hurst his address to the Arnborough electors was in print, to be read by all whom it might concern, and greatly did it seem to concern two young men, seated in the corners of a railway carriage in a train speeding on its rapid way towards London, through the fast falling shades of a late autumn evening. One, bronzed and bearded, turned to his companion with a laugh, as he threw the paper down.

‘*You* wouldn’t have been up to that, old fellow,’ he said.

The laugh was echoed. ‘I wasn’t going to try, at all events.’

‘It would have sounded well though—“C. E. Merivale, Esq., M.P.”—and looked pretty on an envelope. There might have been some satisfaction in writing to you then.’ And Harold—for Harold it was—leant back in his corner with just the same merry twinkle in his blue eyes—shining more brightly than ever now with the prospect of home—that he had taken away eighteen months ago. Charlie, in the joy of gazing at him, at times almost forgot to speak.

‘It will be a great feather in Arnborough’s cap to get hold of such a man,’ Harold went on; ‘it’s an amazing thing that they’ve never been able to get a decent man yet. Poor old Jarvis was respectable, to be sure, but that’s about all that could be said for him.’

‘Why, they had Hugh Merivale once,’ said Charlie, ‘old Hugh—the man in a brown wig above the gallery door. I hope you don’t mean to say he wasn’t “decent and respectable”!’

‘I should doubt it greatly if he pleased that most corrupt place—though, to be sure, those were in the high and mighty days before gentlemen had to descend personally to the dirty work of canvassing. Campbell will do that well, I should think. We must go and help him. I’m

glad I'm just back to see the fun. We'll all go and canvass.'

Charlie burst out laughing. '*You* canvassing, Harry! Shaking hands all down the street, I suppose, and kissing the babies!'

'Oh! I'll take Uncle John to shake hands and Dora to kiss the babies. You are *sure* they will be in Grosvenor Square to-day?' It was the third time the same question had been asked.

'Quite sure; Malcolm wrote yesterday. They are certain to be there.'

'An hour—we may be there in an hour,' said Harold eagerly, as he consulted his watch. 'How are they looking—both of them?'

'I told you I had not seen them since May, and then only for a day.'

'So you did. But when one is so far away one fancies people at home are always together and seeing each other; only you have not been at home.'

'No.'

Something like a sigh struck Harold's ear. He looked at his companion's face, so far as it could be seen by the dim carriage lamp. When they had met a few hours before on the Southampton pier it had been bright with the joy and excitement of welcome, and Harold's eye had instantly been caught by the increased air of manliness and strength, while he had felt, as their hands had clasped with delight, that one

might go half the world over and not meet with such a face as old Charlie's. Now that the flush had faded, he saw the cheeks were thinner, and the lines firmer, and in the expression of the eyes and mouth there was something Harold could not have defined in words—only as he gazed it made him feel that he himself had been a long time away.

‘Dear old boy!’ he said, in tones of truest affection, as he leant forward and put his own sunburnt hand on his friend's, ‘I haven't forgotten how changed that home must be to you and to all of us now. Coming back again would be almost too much joy if it were not for that.’

The clasp was warmly returned. ‘Having you there will make it more like home again for all of us, Harry. It is a blessing you have come, since there must be a beginning now, and the more of us there are to make it bearable for my poor father the better. He comes back from Ireland next week, and is going to the Hanger. Malcolm and Di have promised to come there at once. He never could have begun alone.’

‘Has he never been there since—the winter?’

‘Not to sleep. He went into the house two or three times from Hurst. You know he was at Hurst for a fortnight, when he came back—before he went to Frances.’

‘Yes; Dora wrote to me about his visit.’

‘And he wrote to me.’ Charlie’s cheeks were glowing again. He put his hand in the breast-pocket of his coat, and took out a pocket-book, from which he drew forth a letter which had been lying safely over his heart from the first day of receiving it. Sir Philip had little guessed how it would be treasured while penning these words in all innocence though much sincerity. ‘Sad as this visit has necessarily been to me, I should yet be ungrateful did I not mention its alleviations. To be with your uncle again is no small satisfaction; and Dora has been most unremitting, and I may say dutiful, in her attentions. No daughter could have shown more affectionate solicitude for my comfort in every respect, nor have entered more truly into my feelings. She loved your dear mother as her own—indeed, I shall always look on her as one of our family. She has been my constant companion here, and I shall miss her greatly when I leave Hurst.’ And this when he was going to Frances! The words were far too precious in Charlie’s eyes to be trusted to the gaze of any other person but one. Harold alone might share them. Certainly Harold was both pleased and surprised when he read the praise of the formerly cold Sir Philip; but the letter touched another subject on which he had been longing to enter, and now, in tones earnest and low, even though there were no other ears to hear them,



the two friends talked of the lost and the loved till the homeward way itself seemed short, and lights and sounds were round them before they were aware.

London—familiar London! Whatever else changes round us, the old Lion City's roars and growls go on day after day with the regularity of any law of Nature. There are even moments when, under the hallowing power of association, its prose rises into absolute poetry; when its street cries and carriage wheels, long unheard, fall upon the wanderer's ears like well-remembered music. Harold could not utter a word as they stepped into a hansom and drove away. How natural the lighted streets looked! How wonderful it was to feel that everything had been going on here exactly the same while he had been meeting death face to face a hundred times over! His heart was too full to speak. Charlie was equally silent. Grosvenor Square was reached, the door was flung open, and in another minute all Dora's cares and sorrows seemed over for ever, as she felt her brother's arms close round her once more.

It was a meeting of such perfect joy as might well make the troubles of the past forgotten. Their young soldier had left them as yet untried and unknown; he had returned with laurels on his brow—a source of just pride both to them and to his country. Dangers and toils, wounds

and hardships, the field of battle and the hospital ward, had by turns proved his worth and never found it wanting. Cool in danger, undaunted by difficulty, cheerful and patient under privations and sickness, prompt to obey and fit to command, Harold had shown himself a good soldier in all things. More than this, he held a high place among a glorious brotherhood—a band of heroes—some of whom would return no more, but whose names, whether living or dead, would remain in their country's records for ever, each linked with some especial deed of valour or endurance.

The fame that Harold won at Inkermann had been well sustained at the Redan; and, gifted with one of the best gifts for any leader, the power of inspiring absolute trust in the hearts of others, it had long been known that 'Vaughan's men would follow him anywhere.' Again and again he had been mentioned in the despatches for gallant actions, of which Harry's own opinion was that anyone would have done just the same, only the luck always seemed to come his way. Those at home might be pardoned for thinking this scarcely a full account of the matter. Sir Malcolm had good cause for his pride in welcoming a hero. But in Dora's heart pride was lost in a stronger feeling as she felt the clasp of his arms, the warm kisses on her face. He was Harry—her Harry!—equally beloved, whether

known or unknown to the world; always known, always to be loved by her!

The first rapture of that meeting was too great for any other feelings to intrude upon its completeness. Charlie was there, and was greeted too—warmly, without any peculiar recollections, for now he did but appear as an accessory to one great fact. He had been to meet Harold; he had brought him back! Every other remembrance was at so blessed a moment swallowed up in this one. Other thoughts might return in time, but to-night Dora sat among all she loved best; perfect bliss in every glance, and every glance beginning or ending in Harold; love in her eyes and thankfulness in her heart: a fit emblem in her unspeakable happiness of those for whom it is written, ‘Sorrow shall be turned into joy.’

Harry’s slumbers were, as might be expected, profound, on the first night of his return to Old England; but camp-life had taught him to wake easily as well as to fall asleep rapidly, and a sudden noise, like a loud thump, just outside his bedroom door before daylight could well be said to have appeared, made him start up completely awake in a moment. A scuffle seemed to be going on, and someone or something to be borne off captive, judging from mingled shrill notes of defeat and victory sounding in diminishing cadence down a passage.

‘Who was that?’ he inquired, as the footman entered.

‘Master Gussie and his Bun, sir,’ replied the unperturbed Thomas.

‘His what?’

‘“Bun,” sir. French for “Nuss,” that is’ (Thomas being a travelled man and learned in the tongues).

Having completed his operations he retired, and Harold soon began his own, to discover on descending to the dining-room that military punctuality had brought him down long before the rest of the party would appear. He settled himself comfortably by the fire, and, carefully disposing of his wounded foot, prepared to enjoy that wonderful luxury unknown for many a long day—the morning paper. Before he had got half-way through the war article, however, a clattering was heard on the stairs, something bounced and rattled against the door, which being opened disclosed a young gentleman in a grey cloth tunic, with glowing cheeks and bright brown eyes, his curly black locks peeping from underneath a shining helmet, a wooden sword girt round his waist, and a dangerous looking tin trumpet in his hand; height nearly four feet, age apparently seven years. This apparition stood like a small colossus, with his feet apart, devouring Harold with his bright dark eyes.

‘Hullo,’ said the latter, much amused at the

undaunted stare, 'what's all that? Come here, you small Di in armour.'

'I'm not Di,' returned the invader scornfully. 'Di's the baby. *She's* a girl! *I'm* a boy!'

'So I perceive, and what do you take me for?'

'I know what you are. You're the Captain! Oh, how jolly!' And suddenly quitting his commanding position, Master Angus turned himself head over heels on the carpet, helmet, sword, and all, bringing himself and his weapons close up under Harold's elbow. 'I say,' he said, catching hold of it, 'where's your sword? I want to see it; I want to have it in my hand.'

'Indeed, and do you think swords were made for little children?'

'I'm not a little child! The little children are in the nursery! I'm Angus Malcolm Campbell! I've got a sword too—but it's only wood.' The young hero drew it with a disdainful air. 'There was a tin one in the shop just like real, and mother wouldn't buy it! She said I should poke the baby's eyes out. Stupid baby! I can fight, though,' and he flourished his weapon within an inch of Harry's face.

'Stop that,' said Harold, putting up his arm. 'I've got eyes as well as baby, and I didn't bring them both safe home to be pecked out by a little brat like you with a skewer. So you are Gussie, are you? And what were you thumping at my

door for this morning, young sir? Tell me that.'

'Because I'm a soldier, and I wanted your sword.'

'Did you? Much you know about swords or soldiers either.'

'I do! I know a great deal! I've been in Italy, and in France, and in—great lots of places! I've seen soldiers—great lots of times! I've seen a boy not much bigger than me what was *militaire*—Adèle said so—but he hadn't a sword, only a drum. I wouldn't care to have a drum and not a sword. I'd break it, if they gave it me! I say'—and he seized Harold's coat-sleeve—'how many men have you killed?'

'Never mind that. That's nothing to you.'

'Is it a great many? Is it ten?—is it twenty?'

'I shall tell you nothing about it,' answered Harold, as he measured Master Angus from head to foot by a glance with which the young gentleman was not at all disconcerted.

'Is it a hundred?—have you killed *hundreds* and *hundreds*? Answer—tell me!' and he shook Harold's arm impatiently.

'I'll answer you fast enough, young man,' muttered Harry, as he turned a little away, taking something from his pocket which the boy could not see, nor did he in the least understand what those brown fingers were about till he found

them suddenly clapped on to his mouth, holding down upon it a great piece of sticking-plaster.

Never during the seven years of his existence had Master Angus been so cavalierly treated. Sheer amazement kept him silent for nearly a quarter of a minute, and when he would have begun to remonstrate at the top of his voice, Harold's fingers and the tightening plaster reduced his best efforts to a stifled roar. 'A nice new cure for little chatterboxes,' said the latter, keeping firm hold of his prey. 'Now then, if you'll be still and quiet for a few minutes I'll tell you a thing or two.' There must have been either magic or mesmerism in the good-natured tones and bright blue eyes, for, wonderful to relate, the untamable young Angus, of whom his *bonne* at like moments was wont to declare, 'Mais c'est un petit sauvage, une bête féroce, un vrai ouragan, cet enfant-là!' stood all at once quiet and attentive, his struggles apparently over.

'Now look here,' said his tormentor, 'you've done two wrong things; one you couldn't tell was wrong, and the other you could. First you went on trying to make me answer when I didn't choose to do it; that was rude, and you ought to have known it was wrong. Secondly, you wanted to hear how many men I had killed; killing men, as it happens, isn't an officer's proper business, but whether I had killed a hundred or more you



shouldn't have asked. Never ask that question of anybody again. Killing people is a very serious matter, not to be talked about by little boys like that, though you're even too young to know it. But you say you are a soldier; well, you're old enough to learn what a soldier's chief duties are. Perhaps you think it's all fighting and cutting about, and if so you're quite wrong. Obedience and endurance are the two great things a soldier has to learn; he is fit for nothing without them. Now, I am going to see whether you have got them. I shall take my hand away from your mouth directly, but, first, I tell you not to tear off that bit of plaster for three whole minutes more. It was put there to teach you a lesson, and if you obey me and bear it, why I shall think you've got something in you, and may be fit to be a soldier by-and-by. Now recollect. Here goes.'

It was the first sermon the small Angus had ever listened to from beginning to end. With his eyes as widely open as his mouth was tightly shut, he had gazed at the speaker without losing one syllable. Let us hope the words would be remembered, to bear fruit in due season on battle-fields to come.

Harry, as he finished speaking, removed his fingers from the boy's mouth, and, taking out his watch, sat with it in his hand to count the minutes, apparently as grave as a judge, but in-

wardly not a little amused at his own impromptu experiment on the small stranger, and at the comical appearance of the round childish face beneath the martial head-piece; the rosy lips nearly hidden by the black patch, and the glowing eyes casting forth glances half subdued, half defiant, underneath a mass of sable curls which had tumbled over the white forehead. Like a rock, however, the young hero stood, his hands behind his back, his feet apart, his eyes only occasionally roving between Captain Vaughan's face and the watch before him. While the second hand was accomplishing its allotted rounds—a short period, perhaps, by ordinary reckoning, but, as Harold shrewdly suspected, a longer one than Gussie had ever been known to stand quiet for before. His trial, however, was not over. Just as the third minute began the door opened, a soft rustling was heard, and a gentle voice cried, 'Gussie, dear, where are you?'

A flush of shame mounted to the little boy's brow; and he cast an indignant look at Harold.

'All right,' said the latter; 'soon be over now. Stand firm!' Then, turning to meet the astonished Effie's gaze, 'Good morning,' he said. 'I have found an unexpected brother-in-arms, just at present under the surgeon's hands, you see.'

'He is hurt!' cried Effie, rushing forward.

'Not at all—not the least.' Harold waved her back with a restraining hand, which, after a

moment's thought, he had the politeness to offer in greeting. 'Nothing but a little game between ourselves. You will see him restored to perfect health very shortly—in ten seconds—in five—I may say this very moment. Time's up,' he continued, turning to his victim, and shutting his watch with a click. 'You can go—you'll do!'

Angus the second made a tremendous bound, turning a somersault over an arm-chair, which sent the sticking-plaster flying in one direction and the helmet rolling in another. While Effie dutifully ran to pick it up, he rushed back to Harold, seizing his hand.

'You'll show me your sword now?'

'So I will, by-and-by.'

'And, I say, you won't tell sister why you put it on—that thing, you know?'

'All right, I won't.'

'Nor no one else neither?'

Harold nodded. 'Nor no one else neither.'

After such an introduction it was evident that these two were destined by fate to form a lasting friendship, Effie being left by both to wonder over its remarkable commencement as much as she pleased.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Give me an air, give me a face,  
That makes simplicity a grace.

BEN JONSON.

‘HARRY, how do you think she has grown up?’

Such was Dora’s first question when Effie, disappearing from the drawing-room after breakfast, left the brother and sister to the pleasures of a *tête-à-tête*.

‘Since you ask me, I should say—smart.’

‘You disappointing boy! Surely you admire her pretty soft eyes?’

‘I know some prettier,’ said he, putting his arm into hers. ‘Turn round, little one; I haven’t seen enough of these soft eyes yet.’

‘That’s the first compliment I ever had from you,’ she said, laughing, ‘and of course it comes when it isn’t wanted. But you will be quite out of the fashion if you don’t appreciate Effie’s. They were greatly admired abroad, I am told.’

‘No doubt. *Les beaux yeux de sa cassette* also.’

‘Poor Effie! don’t speak of that! She would like to forget that such a place as Kildrummie

has ever existed. You will like her so much, Harry, when you see more of her.'

'And, if possible—less of her dress. How many yards round do you suppose it may measure?'

'Not more than many other dresses.'

'About twice as much as yours.'

'But I am not a London lady. And you must remember you are a savage who hasn't seen the fashions for a whole year and a half! Effie only dresses in them to please other people who think it right.'

'And who thinks it right she should be hung about with all those chains and bangles? She rattled like an escaped convict when she ran upstairs just now.'

'Harry, you are too bad!—as bad as ever! One would have thought that after all your rough life you would have been overjoyed at the sight of your first young lady.'

'And who says I wasn't?' said Harry, as he turned his sister's face up towards his own brown countenance, the more conveniently to give it some very hearty kisses. 'And she's looking—I won't tell her how—frightful, of course; still I'm glad to see the little face again. Somehow there's not another like it, unless it might be old Charlie's; you and he make about a pair.'

The face on which his loving eyes were rest-

ing did not grow less fair for the bright blush that covered it now.

‘Where is he?’ said Harry.

‘Charlie? I think he must be with Uncle John. Sit down, dear. You ought not to stand so much; you are lamer than I thought you would be—that is what I have been longing to ask you about.’ And installing her brother in an arm-chair, she drew a low seat beside him, so that, hand clasped in hand and face turned to face, she might hear all the particulars of his wound—at least, as many as Harry could be induced to give—and urge upon him the wisdom of showing it at once to a London surgeon.

Harold did not seem to care much about this. ‘Old Dr. Time is the only fellow who can do much for it now, I fancy,’ said he, looking down on the wounded member with cool indifference, as though it were something quite distinct from himself; ‘and it remains to be seen whether even he can make much hand of it, or, I should say, much foot.’

‘How? What do you mean?’

‘Why, as the nerves have been shot away, and nobody can say for certain whether they will unite again or not, we must just wait and see.’

‘But you never told me that!’ she cried.

‘Where’s the good of crying over spilt milk? Now, don’t you begin it, bad child.’

‘But, Harry, if they don’t unite?’

‘I shall be lame, more or less; but what does that matter? Those that can’t walk must ride, and suppose I did have to turn into a plunger, why, it might be worse.’

‘I know,’ she said in a trembling voice, ‘it might have been your whole foot.’

‘My whole foot! *My whole self!* How often do you suppose I have thought I might never see home and any of you again?’

‘Not oftener than I,’ she answered fervently, clasping his hands in hers. ‘Yes, you are right. To have you back—that is what we must think of. But you will be good—you will see a surgeon? Here is Charlie coming; he will persuade you and Uncle John too.’

Charlie it was now entering the room, but the gentleman behind him was not Uncle John. By Harold’s side nothing could discompose or disturb his sister. She looked with an air of quiet friendliness at a face long unseen, and when, after a cordial greeting to Harold, Mr. Campbell turned with a little hesitation towards herself, she smiled and held out her hand as though it had been seven days, not seven years, since he had touched it last.

‘I am not going to intrude for more than one minute,’ he said, ‘but I could not refrain from coming up when I heard that your brother had really returned safe and sound.’



‘Safe,’ said Charlie, ‘but not exactly sound. Sit down, Harry.’

‘Yes. Pray don’t let me disturb you. And now you have come home to be nursed. You mean to take great care of him, no doubt, Miss Vaughan.’

‘I mean it certainly, and only hope I may be allowed to do it.’

‘At such a time you can hardly have a refractory patient, and home and rest will be the best specific. I was so sorry to miss Mr. Merivale the other day when I had the pleasure of finding myself at Hurst Grange again.’

‘Ah!’ cried Harold, ‘and we must congratulate you too—and ourselves—and Arnborough most of all, on the prospect of its future M.P.’

‘Its future M.P.? My dear sir, do you forget that there is a Mr. Carpenter in existence, and I regret to say——’

‘Of course there is, and all the better, or where would be the fun? See if we don’t bowl him over, for Charlie and I are coming round with you, if you’ll have us.’

‘Indeed, I shall be unspeakably grateful. With a Crimean hero on one side and the owner of the common on the other, I feel as though I could defy a whole army of Carpenters. But Malcolm is waiting for me downstairs, and I promised not to keep him three seconds. Good-

bye, good-bye,' and he was gone, having scarcely reached his own allotted minute.

'The owner of the common,' repeated Harold. 'To be sure! Charlie, I've hardly begun to realise what a bigwig you must be—a local benefactor, a landed proprietor, and a millionaire. Ah! by the way, I have something to show you—both of you.'

He took a small parcel wrapped in paper from his pocket, and laid it before them. Within the paper lay a little old tract and a lady's glove.

With surprise at first, and then with a sudden flash of recollection, Dora saw upon the much worn cover of the tract, in her own handwriting, her own name.

'That tract, Harry—was it—could it be this?'

'That is the tract Tom Barnes sent me.'

'This?' Charlie took it up and gazed at it in silence. 'And this,' he said presently, laying it down again, 'was what made you go?'

'Nothing but that. The Arnborough people would never have kept their common without that. You may thank this for your fifty thousand.'

'Not it, but you, and for something much more precious than money—for my good name. Harry, I owe it all to you.' He put his arm over his friend's shoulder, and looked in his eyes with silent, unspeakable gratitude.

'Not at all—not to me.'

‘What do you mean?’ cried Dora; ‘it was you who did it all.’

‘On the contrary, little one, it was yourself.’

‘Myself?’

‘To be sure! I should never have thought of speaking to poor Barnes in that dying state about Charlie if you had not written saying how you wished he could be found, as possibly he might give some clue. It was only on that, that I spoke at all.’

‘Dora, then it was you—your thought,’ said Charlie, turning to her.

‘No, not at all; all the doing was Harry’s.’

‘But I should have done nothing if you had not written. Besides, if you hadn’t visited old Lyddy Tom could never have got hold of the tract, and I shouldn’t have tramped off that night for anything less than your handwriting, I can tell you.’

‘But that was the merest accident, it had no real connection with the matter; and anyone can make a suggestion, it is acting upon it that is the great thing. *Indeed*, Harry, it was your doing.’

‘Very well, we’ll share and share alike, like old times,’ said he, stroking her hair. ‘She’s just the same funny little creature she was—not a bit altered, is she, Charlie?’

‘But this glove?’ said Dora, taking it up; ‘this did not come with it?’

‘No, it was in his pocket-book with the tract when it was brought to me after his death.’

‘But it is my glove.’

‘Are you sure of that?’

‘Yes—almost. I know I had gloves like this, and now it seems to me I did lose just such a glove the last time I went up to Stone Farm. Yes, I am sure I did; and this is the very glove. How extraordinary that it should come back now! But how strange he should ever have taken it! What could it possibly have been for?’

She turned the glove over wonderingly, unconscious of the silent gaze with which the two young men were regarding her.

‘Isn’t it extraordinary, Harry?’

‘Well’—Harold pulled the long ends of his moustache—‘he wanted a remembrance, perhaps.’

‘Yes; and I could understand his taking the tract, for I had left that some time before, and he may have read it to Lydia himself. But very likely I read it to her again, and my glove may have been shut up inside it, and he may have taken both up hastily together. I should think it must have been that. Oh! poor Tom,’ and Dora looked up, the quick tears rushing to her eyes, ‘to think that he had nothing better to take away as a remembrance of her and his home than this old tract.’

‘It wasn’t much of a home, certainly,’ said

Harold after a pause, 'and I don't suppose he ever did want to remember it.'

'Not the place, oh no! and he had scarcely any but old Lyddy to care for.'

'Not many besides, I suppose, poor fellow. No,' and Harold's countenance changed. 'One can't help wishing now one had tried to do more for him. Charlie hasn't that to reproach himself with though.'

'But you went to him at last,' she said, unwilling to hear Harold blamed even by Harold's self.

'Through no love of him though, I am afraid. Well—live and learn. One would do differently next time, but then the very next time never seems to come. He had Charlie to care about though, and he saw Uncle John and you——'

'Not me; hardly ever, at least, excepting at last, when I went up to Stone Farm.'

'Well, anyhow, Hurst was the best thing in his life, I've no doubt.' Harold rose. 'I must be off to the Horse Guards now, so good-bye for the present. Uncle John said he should be going out too. Are you coming, Charlie?'

'Yes, directly.'

He left the window where he had been standing and followed Harold to the door, but not beyond it. He shut it and came back again.

'Dora, whatever you say, it *was* your doing

quite as much as Harold's. I owe you all that makes a life worth having.'

'No, no! I had scarcely anything to do with it.'

'Don't deny it, unless you want to make me think—— But at any rate you would have been glad to do it for my mother's sake, I know.'

'Charlie! how can you? As if I would not have done anything in the world to help you.'

She held out both hands. He took them, pressed them, looked at her, and left the room.

In spite of Harold's indifference the general verdict, that there must be a medical consultation over his foot, could not be resisted. It took place, therefore, the next day, and verified Harold's prophecy, his friend Dr. Time being the great power referred to for effecting a cure. Meantime he must be careful, rest it much, use it most moderately, &c., &c., which the patient secretly interpreted to mean that he was to do exactly as he felt inclined, and resolved to act accordingly.

There was little now to detain the Hurst party in London, and Sir Malcolm could let them go with the less reluctance as all soon hoped to meet again in the country. Two meetings, however, there were which Harold could not omit. The first was with the faithful Miss Goode, who alternately laughed and cried for joy, and believed herself both the happiest and

the proudest woman in England as she sat once more gazing at 'her own dear boy' again. The second meeting was a very different and far sadder one. Frederick Waller's widowed mother and only sister had hastened to London from their distant country home as soon as the approach of Harold's steamer had been announced. To them, therefore, he must go to take the few precious relics of the son and brother who would return no more; to give the last message and describe the latest moments. Dora could not wonder that he returned from such an interview sadder than she had ever seen him before, nor that he could say but little during the rest of the day. It was a sorrow not to pass away lightly; the mourning faces of the mother and sister could not be forgotten, nor his own personal sorrow and deep regret for the truest and most devoted of friends. Harold's was not a nature that could lightly attach itself, but neither was it one that could ever forget a friendship, and now as he turned his face towards home and recalled the high hopes with which he had left it, could almost have echoed the Preacher's words, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

He had longed for action, for great deeds, for triumphant success and an honoured name, of which more than himself might be proud. Those wishes had been granted, his dreams had been more than fulfilled, and now he had learnt



the real worth of such a fulfilment. He had seen how deeply stained are the leaves with which Victory wreathes her crown, and had turned with a breaking heart from a field of glory.

At Hurst, both village and Grange were putting on their brightest face to receive their hero, who himself could not but brighten with returning gladness at the sight of each well-known object. The downs, the woods, the very sky itself seemed wearing a smile of greeting for the home-coming wanderer. Soon the carriage was stopped by eager hands, a hundred warm welcomes were sounding in the familiar village voices, old faces crowded round, every creature in the place pressed forward, longing for a sight of 'Our Captain—God bless him!' and Harry's hand was nearly shaken off before he was allowed to be borne onwards, beneath an arch of whose glories all the village geniuses might well be proud, to the door of his own home at last. There stood the household in new caps and aprons—not one face missing, not one old friend lost—all decked with laurel and myrtle, from the collar of the smallest terrier to the breast of the portly Mrs. Sage, in whose kitchen Harry had once made toffy and cakes, and who now stood dropping the lowest of curtsies till he caught hold of both her hands to give them a most hearty squeeze.

How beautiful the house looked, all dressed by old Jerry's care with autumn leaves and flowers! How brightly the firelight shone on the walls of the dear old rooms, on every unforgotten object within them! How natural to sink down in his own old place with the old faces beside him, old voices sounding in his ear, and Sultan's head upon his knee once more! These things, long known only in the dreams of a soldier's life, were now in all their reality before him, while the camp, the march, the battle-field seemed in their turn to be fading away into dreams and dreamland before the beloved certainties of home.

## CHAPTER XX.

THE home-coming to the Hanger, which was to take place in a couple of days, would be a very different one from Harold's return to Hurst. The house had been closed since January. Sir Philip had shrunk from beginning life there again, and preferred to remain with his sons and daughters at Nice or in Switzerland. By the end of July, however, he had grown tired of foreign life, and had accepted his brother's pressing invitation to spend a month or so at Hurst Grange. This would be, as all felt, far better for him than his own deserted home. The Campbells were going for two months to Glenarchie, and thence to London, promising to pay a long visit to the Hanger so soon as Sir Philip should wish to occupy his own home again. He had been in no hurry to quit the Grange, and could have remained there very willingly till October came, had not an old promise obliged him to pay the Barrymores a visit in Ireland, whence he was now expected.

The Campbells came down to receive him, bringing with them Angus Campbell, who was

by Sir Philip's desire to make the Hanger his home during his canvass at Arnborough. Phil, his arm now nearly recovered, would also be at home, as well as Charlie ; and Sir Philip, far from returning to the empty home he had been dreading, would find it peopled with a large party, gay with children's voices and filled with the busy stir of life.

Into the prevailing excitement respecting the coming election he could not indeed be expected to enter, and, after giving a welcome equally stately and sincere to Angus Campbell, he said little more about the matter ; but to see himself surrounded by the other members of the party was a cause of pleasure much more sensibly felt by Sir Philip now than would have been the case in former years. Friends are like the leaves of the Sibyl's book—as their number lessens their value increases. The pleasure which shone in his eyes was most unmistakable when the party from Hurst arrived to dinner. He grasped his brother's hand with cordial joy, welcomed Harold almost as a son, and Dora altogether as a daughter.

To others of the party their appearance was, for reasons of their own, equally welcome ; but nothing was said on the great topic of the election until Sir Philip, pleading fatigue from his long journey, had retired after dinner with the ladies. Then every tongue was unloosed in

eager discussion, while Angus Campbell turned as though instinctively to the Vicar of Hurst, having already discovered that he knew as much of the Arnborough townsfolk as Mr. Brown himself, and could answer questions and give an opinion with a briefness and clearness refreshing to a legal mind.

‘I have been longing for you all this afternoon, Mr. Merivale,’ he said, ‘when I was in Arnborough. It was tantalising kindness you showed yesterday—just proving how much you could have done for me, and then refusing to do it!’

‘To get covered with mud if I did! No, no; I must stay at home and keep my coat clean. And what do such clever folk and sharp young fellows as you all are want of a sleepy old parson like me?’

‘I want you to tell me who are the leading spirits of Arnborough—the mighty men!’

‘Brown could do that for you—but where are the lists? We can soon look them over.’

Pencils, paper, and lists were quickly furnished, and the Vicar began making notes and comments as his eye ran down them. ‘Prospect Place’ was presently reached. ‘Your houses, Charlie—ten votes there, I see.’

Prospect Place was the name of a row of small houses on the common, which had been sold with land.

‘What are they down as?’ asked Charlie.

‘“Doubtful” marked to the lot. Ah! well, you must give them an early call to-morrow. “River Row,” that’s a different affair—street of low pot-houses—they’ll be all Carpenter’s to a man.’

Charlie retired to the fire, where he stood for some time, apparently engaged in breaking the point of his pencil against the mantelpiece. At the first pause in the conversation, however, his voice was heard:

‘I am afraid, Campbell, I may as well say at once I can’t go with you to those houses of mine to-morrow.’

‘Why not?’ came from every mouth.

‘Because, if I canvassed my own tenants, it would seem like obliging them to vote my own way.’

‘Well, and you want to, don’t you?’ said his brother.

‘No, I don’t.’

‘Don’t want Campbell to beat Carpenter?’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the Vicar.

‘You don’t disapprove of canvassing, surely,’ said Sir Malcolm.

‘Not at all—only of coercion.’

‘Coercion!’ cried Phil again, ‘and a very proper thing too! Discipline’s coercion, isn’t it, and where should we have been in the Crimea without discipline, and why shouldn’t these

beggars at Arnborough be coerced for the good of the country, I should like to know?’

‘The two things are totally different. If a tenant votes to please his landlord, he may be doing violence to his own conscience, and I cannot think that right.’

‘Lovely!’ said Harold; ‘only, my dear Charlie, you must be somewhere about a couple of hundred years in advance of your age. Take all the votes you can get, and don’t ask too many questions as to how you came by them—that’s as far as we have got in the nineteenth century. Your morality is beautiful—but expensive.’

‘Nonsense,’ said the Vicar, ‘there is nothing whatever immoral in one man calling on another and telling him how he is going to vote himself, and giving his reasons for it; that is all you will have to do to-morrow.’

‘True,’ said Harold dryly, ‘and holding a loaded pistol to their heads meanwhile adds a good deal of point to the information.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘His power of expulsion.’

‘He would never expel them, we all know that,’ said Sir Malcolm.

‘We may, but they don’t. If they did I should say his influence as landlord would be limited.’

‘Besides,’ said Charlie, ‘though I don’t sup-



pose I should ever expel a good tenant, yet if I had a choice of a new one, I shouldn't, other things being equal, let to a Radical.'

'Of course not,' cried Phil, 'unless you were a born idiot; and if that's fair, so it is to make them vote your way if you can.'

'That doesn't follow. In one case I shouldn't be compelling any man's conscience, in the other I should.'

'But you would be making a man suffer for his political opinions,' said Sir Malcolm.

'Not unfairly, I think; not more than I should make myself suffer. He would lose his chance of my house, but I should diminish the demand for them, and so run the risk of losing rent.'

Angus nodded involuntarily. 'Clear-headed,' he murmured to himself. 'Like his uncle.'

'Do you absolutely mean to say,' asked his uncle, 'that you will not call on any one of these tenants to-morrow?'

'Yes; I cannot go. I do not think I ought.'

'Then, in my opinion, you quite mistake your duty. If they have any respect for you in your character of landlord, why not use such influence over them to guide them to what you think best for themselves and the country? It is the legitimate and natural state of things between any person in your position and his

dependents. Use them well, gain their confidence, and then, so far as you can, direct their judgments on questions which it is pretty certain you understand a good deal better than they do.'

Sir Malcolm murmured an assent. 'The only right way,' he said.

'The easiest, anyhow,' muttered Harry.

'You see,' continued Mr. Merivale, 'that quite apart from any party grounds this is the wholesome and proper relation of one class to another. Those who have little knowledge are absolutely obliged to lean on those who have more. The upper classes have no business to desert the part of leaders, and leave the lower to the mercy of demagogues and agitators. Let your tenants, who probably know next to nothing whatever about politics, trust to your knowledge and wisdom instead of their own.'

'My knowledge and wisdom!' said Charlie, smiling. 'I should be ashamed to let them know how small they are.'

'And yet,' said the Vicar quickly, 'you refuse to be advised in this matter by those who have had a good deal more experience than yourself.'

'Yes,' was the frank answer, 'I am very sorry, Uncle John, but I am afraid I do. I must. If I had no convictions at all on the subject, I would come to you directly to be told

what to do, but as I have I don't see how I can go against them, and that is just what I feel about my tenants themselves. They may be even more ignorant than I am, but still I can never wish them to go against their political conscience and their convictions to please me.'

'Political conscience! I don't suppose there's such a thing amongst the ten! These sort of people haven't any "convictions," as you call them, strong enough to produce a conscience. You might as well talk to a set of children on politics as to them!'

'But could there be any surer way of keeping them like children than by always appealing to their feelings and never to their reason?'

'I can tell you, Charlie, it is my firm belief that the people of England were much happier, and safer too, when they were more like children, contented to be governed by those above them, without trying to meddle in the matter half so much themselves.'

'That may be so—I cannot tell. But if the change has come, so that they cannot honestly follow us now with their eyes shut, whatever they may once have done, ought we not to wish them honestly to follow what they believe to be best so far as they see it. We have to act in the present; we cannot bring back that time of childhood now.'

'Bring it back—no—worse luck! But we

need not urge on the contrary evil, as you would seem to be for doing. But please yourself; we must get on with the work.'

The Vicar turned back to the lists—with which Mr. Campbell had apparently been entirely engrossed during the conversation—a cloud upon his brow, very seldom seen there. The rest turned also, excepting Charlie, who took no further part in the discussions, and before long joined his father and sister in the library. Half an hour later he came into the drawing-room, to find Harold and Dora talking eagerly by the fire, while Effie at a little distance was bending over a large piece of work.

'There,' cried Harold, 'there he is—the family renegade! You a Conservative!'

'Of course I am.'

'You'll be looked on as a wolf in sheep's clothing henceforward! Why, Uncle John's hair nearly stood on end.'

'Don't laugh, Harry! I know I vexed him. I only wish I could have helped it.'

'If he is vexed to-night,' said Dora, 'it will be over to-morrow, we may be certain.'

'And Charlie was right, surely,' said a gentle voice.

Harold turned round in surprise, for it was a voice that seldom made itself heard.

'You think so—do you?'

Effie blushed at finding she had to speak

again. 'Only—if he thinks it might make them say what wasn't true, he must have been right.'

'That is just what I do think,' said Charlie.

'Wishing for one man and voting for another is not exactly telling a lie,' said Harold.

'But it is acting one, which is worse,' said Dora and Charlie in a breath.

'Maybe; I don't deny it.'

'But if we see that,' cried Dora, 'how strange that Uncle John does not, when he sees the meaning of everything so quickly; and unless he thought it right he would never wish it to be done.'

'Certainly not.'

'What can be the reason of it then?'

'You never came to a question of politics before, that's all.'

'But why should politics make the difference?' asked his sister.

'Dear me! what a curious creature it is!'

'Of course it is; and dissatisfied too, when it finds itself disagreeing with its Uncle John! So tell me why you think politics are different from other things.'

'Anything for a quiet life! Well, then, did you see Angus the less in the hall just before we left Grosvenor Street?'

'I saw him carried off crying—yes.'

'Just so, because he would throw percussion caps into the fire. One parent favoured him

with a most sensible speech on the subject—entirely in vain; the other bore him off in her arms to the nursery. Which was the better plan?’

‘Di’s, of course; there was nothing else to be done then.’

‘But if he had been twice his present age—in jackets instead of petticoats—which would you think the best way then?’

‘Sir Malcolm’s, no doubt.’

‘And at what particular age would you change one way for the other?’

‘I don’t know, indeed; it would depend on circumstances.’

‘It is conceivable, then, that good people might differ as to the exact moment when you must leave off force and appeal to reason.’

‘Very conceivable, I should think.’

‘Just so, and can’t the same difference of opinion be held as to the enlightened British public? Uncle John imagines it to be in petticoats, Charlie—in jackets—that’s where it is.’

She smiled. ‘And with that I am to be content. Well, I’ll think over your parable.’

‘Do; and I now move that this portion of the British public request Miss Campbell to favour it with a song.’

Effie started. ‘*Miss Campbell.*’ Was that to be her title? She blushed deeply, remembering that from old custom she had both

thought and spoken of Harold by his Christian name, but mercifully—as she now reflected—not in his own hearing. Murmuring something about fetching music, she sprang up hastily, entangling at the same moment in her own chair the skirt of her dress, which tore across in a wide rent. She would not stay an instant for her companions' sympathy, but, catching it up, hurried quickly from the room.

‘What a pity!’ said Dora; ‘such a pretty dress.’

‘It *was* pretty,’ said Harold, ‘and less outrageously smart than usual.’

The others laughed, knowing well Harry's fancies in ladies' attire, and that this only won his approval because it was entirely white. But his words had reached other ears. The thick walls of the Hanger made double doors necessary to all the rooms; the inner one of the drawing-room was standing open, and on the hinge of the outer one Effie's torn drapery had caught, detaining her long enough to hear plainly Harold's words within. They served only to quicken her steps, but by the time she reached her own room tears were standing in her eyes. Was this what was said of her, and by Harold—no, ‘*Captain Vaughan*,’ of whom she had always thought as a kind old friend? Instead of that he seemed to be an acute critic whose words puzzled, while his looks frightened,



her. He was not like Charlie. 'He cannot know,' she thought, as she changed the torn dress for one that she now supposed must be 'outrageously smart,' 'that mamma orders all my things, so I can't help it. But perhaps when I am one-and twenty I shall be able to dress like Dora.' She took up her music with a patient little sigh, and went downstairs again, to sing her songs in a voice too well trained by foreign masters for any signs of distress to be perceptible. But when Harold approached the piano to thank her, she shrank back and got out of his way.

The conclave in the dining-room sat so long that the carriage waited some time at the door before the Vicar was ready for it.

'Good-night, Charlie,' he said, as all mingled for a moment in the hall. 'I don't wish to see you a better man, but I sincerely hope you may live to be a wiser one.'

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE next fortnight brought Charlie plenty of opportunities of proving that any objection to visiting his own tenants was owing to no want of zeal for the cause which Angus Campbell represented. He was in Arnborough daily, oftener even than Harold, whose attention was partly devoted to another piece of business in which he was just now taking a particular interest, and who lay also under Mr. Lister's strictest orders to do little more than sit in the pony-carriage at the voters' doors, while Charlie was for ever running up high stairs and plunging into dingy cellars to secure, if possible, some doubtful vote; and whatever his principles might be, Mr. Campbell felt a secret assurance that not a few promises were given, not for any love of Conservatism in general, but from very particular gratitude to the preserver of the Arnborough common. The popularity which this had brought to the name of Merivale was something hitherto unknown in the annals of the town, and that which Charlie had won at a distance he was not likely to lose on a closer acquaintance. The

only fault, indeed, that Mr. Brown had to find with his electioneering corps was with 'Mr. Charles's habit of being affable all round ;' he had seen him more than once shaking hands with a Liberal in the street, a deed which Mr. Brown opined might naturally offend 'our own side.' Charlie's offers in this direction were not always well received. Angus himself once observed him crossing the street, and addressing a man on the other side—a very ill-looking man too, he thought, who appeared to be returning some very unpleasant remarks of his own, judging by the coarse, surly tones of which the sound, though not the sense, was audible across the street.

'Who is that?' he asked, as Charlie came back. 'Not one of us, is he?'

'Oh, no!'

'What is his name?'

'Grover.'

The name seemed not entirely unknown to Angus ; but he could not remember how he had heard it, and had no time to inquire more. He was a most diligent canvasser himself, and every day was filled from morning till night with meetings, visits, and speeches, the Hanger being of little use excepting as a place to sleep in, so wholly was he occupied out of doors.

The exciting day came at last, and the Hanger was emptied of the chief part of its inhabitants,

all eager to see if not to share in the fray. Sir Philip alone had no intention of being present, and as soon as Dora had heard this, she had announced her own intention of coming over to keep him company, so that Di and Effie, who must naturally be more keenly interested in the result of the election than she could be supposed to be, should be set perfectly free to spend as many hours as they pleased at the bay window overlooking the hustings, which the friendly Mr. Johnson had placed at the disposal of Hurst and Hanger for the entire day.

The short space of three and a half miles could seldom have separated two more different scenes than those which Arnborough and the Hanger presented throughout the election day; the one all noise and excitement, with human passion wrought up to its highest pitch, as the eager warfare raged and drew nearer and nearer its close, while over the other brooded a peace even more profound than that which usually hung around its old walls, the very servants having rushed to the scene of contest. Only the demure Mr. Bennet, with a face as unmoved as his master's, stood behind Sir Philip's chair as he and Dora sat down to their luncheon at the long forsaken table—a piece of folded paper on a silver waiter in his hand.

‘The state of the poll at twelve o’clock, Sir Philip, in case you might wish to see it.’

Sir Philip glanced at the paper as he took up the carving-knife. 'Ah! Campbell, 331; Carpenter, 315—a very close affair. I am obliged to you, Bennet, for thinking of it. Some chicken, my dear Dora?'

Thus, wrapped in the Hanger's dignified repose, they passed together Angus Campbell's election day, for his it was. His good star had not forsaken him, and it was a triumphant, tired, delighted party that returned with the darkness, consisting of the ladies and Uncle John only, the gentlemen remaining to dine with a selection of supporters at the 'George.' But the Vicar, eager as any boy, roused up his brother's languor into something like interest as he, Di, and Effie, the latter with flushed cheeks and eyes sparkling with delight, told all the tales of the day, and fought its fights anew. Effie, formed by nature to live in the deeds of those she loved and be happy in their happiness, was transported out of her usual timid self with joy at her uncle's success, and with the thought of a new link to her much loved Hurst.

'He will so often be down here now,' she said, 'and it will be such an interest to papa; he will always be wanting to come too. Fancy, if he were to take a house here instead of staying in London, how delightful it would be!'

Sir Philip overheard, and replied with stately kindness, 'The Hanger must be that house, my

dear; there will at all times be room in it for your party, and the oftener your uncle can give us the honour of a visit the better I shall be pleased, I assure you.'

Effie felt how grateful she ought to be, and tried to believe that Hanger and Hurst were the same—a difficult matter, unless Uncle John and Dora chanced to be staying in the former house.

Dora's own feelings on the subject of the election could not be imparted to anyone. Although it was impossible that she should absolutely wish her many eager friends to be disappointed and Mr. Campbell defeated, she had certainly wished at the beginning that he would have chosen to represent some other place. She had buried her past in peace; she did not want to have its ghost rise up to haunt her. She had thought it would be impossible to avoid being thrown much into his company at the Hanger during the period preceding the election, or that she should be so without vividly recalling days of which the very memory was painful. She had found herself mistaken in both anticipations. Mr. Campbell was so immersed in business that she seldom saw and still seldom spoke to him, and when she did see him he appeared to be a different creature from the Mr. Campbell she had once known. There was little indeed in this preoccupied, keen-looking

man, whose mind seemed entirely set upon preparing for the fight before him, and his head wholly filled with voters' names and party politics, to recall the Angus who had sung Scotch ballads on the moors and lingered at sunset beside the loch. When he at length quitted the Hanger for London, as Arnborough's chosen member, she felt that instead of regretting, she could rejoice that this visit had been paid, since, far from reviving, it had served to blot out all memory of former days. Henceforward she was satisfied that she should be able to meet him as one belonging to the present time alone.

The subject which had in some degree distracted Harold's attention from the election was one of considerable interest to his sister also. A house in the outskirts of the parish was vacant, and no sooner did Harold hear of this than he instantly determined on filling it with tenants of his own selection. He had found on visiting Mrs. and Miss Waller in London that they were at that very time in need of a home. The former had been left a widow not twelve months before, and had since remained with her eldest son at the family home in the North of England. This son was about to be married, and was anxious to transfer his mother and sister to a second and smaller house on the property, an arrangement of which Harold, who knew the place, entirely



disapproved. He declared it to be a wretched little box which any son ought to be ashamed to put a mother into ; Jack Waller himself he described as a disagreeable, domineering man, who only wanted to have his woman-kind near him that he might rule over them like a despot ; and there could be no manner of doubt that Mrs. Waller would be much happier safe out of his reach, in a comfortable house like Fernhill, in a pretty country, and within comparatively easy distance of London, where she had many other relations settled. He was so determined and so prompt, that within a week of his own return Mrs. Waller had been induced by him to come down from town with her daughter to inspect the house, and within another week to make an offer for the same, encouraged thereto by the absence of the alarming Jack and the presence of the vigorous Harold, who himself went up to London more than once to keep her to her resolution, and to see the business matters put in a proper train. Dora would have wondered at his resolute energy in the whole affair had she not detected in it an unspoken determination to supply to a lonely elderly lady, as far as might be possible, the place of the son whom she had lost. It was a wish to be respected, and she gladly agreed to assist him in every way that she could, in the work of preparing the house for its new inhabi-

tants. It was to be taken on trial for a year, to be let furnished for that period, and immediate occupation was to be had.

Very little need be done before the new tenants could take possession, and that little Harold personally superintended, going over several times in the course of the next week to assure himself that both paperhanger and carpenter were doing their duty properly.

‘Harold seems to be giving himself a world of trouble about these Wallers,’ was Di’s remark one day.

‘So he is. He would do anything for his poor friend’s relations.’

‘No doubt; but as they are not at all poor relations, I don’t see why he is to save them the expense of an agent.’

‘He likes it. I am sure he wants Mrs. Waller to feel she has someone to turn to still, just as if her son were alive.’

‘Exactly what I should have believed of him,’ said Sir Malcolm.

‘Mrs. Waller?’ said Di; ‘and does he never say a word about *Miss* Waller?’

‘Never,’ said Dora laughing.

‘And have you never asked him?’

‘Once, and was told he believed I should find her a “good sort of a girl,” with which description I have had to remain content.’

‘A good sort of a girl! One must hope so

indeed, for, really, three times a week at Fernhill looks suspicious.'

'But they are not there.'

'Oh, no! But if you find him going three times a week when they *are* there, prepare for the worst, my dear.'

'The worst! How can you tell it would not be for the best? But don't you know Harry better than that? Excepting Effie and the Ansteys and the Falconers, whom he has known all his life and never minds talking to, I don't believe there is a young lady in the world whom he would not think it rather a trouble to have to entertain.'

'Still,' said Sir Malcolm, 'someone may be found to tame his savage breast in time. You have never seen this young lady, you say; she may be all that is lovely and charming.'

'And if she is I do not believe it would be of any use. Harry would think nothing of criticising Venus herself and all her Graces!'

'People of that sort,' cried Di, 'always put me out of patience. Why are *they* to be harder to please than anyone else? The only comfort is that they generally end by marrying their cook at last!'

Sir Malcolm burst out laughing. 'My dear Di,' he expostulated; say "*on* to the cook," pray, while you are about it, as we do in the Highlands.'

'He will be disappointed if he attempts it,'

said Dora gravely. 'Mrs. Sage will certainly refuse him!'

'You may laugh as much as you please,' said Di confidently, 'but you will see that I am right. All men marry at last, and if Harold won't do anything like other people he will find a wife in some odd out-of-the-way manner when you least expect it. Now I should not be at all surprised, supposing this Miss Waller turns out to be a very plain, unpleasant sort of girl, if he chooses to take a fancy to her just for the sake of her brother.'

'But if she is plain and unpleasant she will not be at all like her brother, and if she is the reverse, then, by all our rules, Harold is safe.'

'Well, well, only remember my prophecy! He will astonish you some day.'

Dora did remember Di's words when, the Wallers having arrived, she set forth with Harold to call on them for the first time—and not without amusement. The Vicar, as ready to offer a welcome to his parish as to his house, had found his way there before them, and brought back so good a report that she was not at all surprised at being ushered into the presence of two very pleasing ladies. Miss Waller's simple, sensible, and well-bred manner was the first attraction that Dora perceived as they conversed together, and the sympathy she had long felt for her while unseen was further quickened by the involuntary sad-

ness which betrayed itself in many looks and tones, a sadness which she feared could only be increased by the first sight of herself and Harold. A quarter of an hour's observation, moreover, satisfied her that Lucy Waller had other charms, and that her pale face and dark eyes needed only a little more colour and brightness to be absolutely pretty; they might have had them formerly. There was a certain likeness to her brother, enough to make anyone who had cared for him find a pleasure in watching her. But Dora could have smiled in the midst of her compassion, and wished for Di to be there that she might have seen Harold devoting himself entirely to the service of Mrs. Waller, a gentle, timid, elderly lady, who, having all her life been dependent on others, was now receiving with sincerest gratitude all Captain Vaughan's wise advice about leases, fixtures, and workmen. As he never once turned round the young ladies were left wholly to themselves, but Dora found the visit neither long nor dull, though, thanks for all the assistance they had received, praises of Fernhill, and some description of the home they had left were Lucy's chief topics.

When the visit was returned Harold was out, and while Uncle John attended to the mother Dora again talked to the daughter. Miss Waller's eyes were soon directed towards a portrait hang-

ing on the wall of the drawing-room at the Grange.

‘Is not that Mr. Charles Merivale?’ she asked.

‘Yes; it is a copy of one at the Hanger, taken when he was a boy.’

‘It is very like him now—at least as I remember him a year or two ago.’

‘You saw him at Oxford, perhaps?’

‘Yes; I was not in company with him more than once or twice, but his is not a face one can forget. He is as delightful as he looks, is he not—as I heard he was, I mean?’

As Dora assented, her attention was caught by a slight hesitation in her companion’s manner and a faint glow of warmth upon her cheek.

‘I heard,’ continued Miss Waller in a lower voice, ‘of his conduct about the cheque, and his keeping silence for his mother’s sake. How beautiful it was—how noble! I do not wonder his friends should have spoken of him as they have done. “The Modern Bayard,” I have heard him called.’

‘Really? Charlie would be astonished! Who can have said it, I wonder?’

Miss Waller hesitated again. ‘I—I have heard it from more than one—Captain Vaughan’—she was colouring more evidently than before—‘and others.’ The sentence was finished with such unmistakable sadness that Dora at once guessed she had heard of him from her own brother, who

had known Charlie well, and regretted her eager question.

‘You will see him soon yourself, I have no doubt,’ she said, ‘and be able to judge whether he has altered much since this portrait was taken.’

‘Yes. Is he at the Hanger?’

‘He is supposed to be living in London just now, but he is always down on Saturday and Sunday, and often on other days.’

‘Then is it true that he is reading law?’

‘A—little.’

‘I heard it,’ said Lucy, ‘and I was surprised, as I had been told he always meant to be a clergyman. Has that been given up?’

‘He is too young,’ said Dora hastily. ‘Nothing is settled about his future yet. When his mother died all that was thought of was that he should stay with his father, and he could not leave him yet entirely, but Sir Philip wished him to read some law. He is constantly up and down, but we do not know how long this will go on.’

It was Miss Waller’s turn to feel from her companion’s manner that she might have touched on a painful subject. She assented slightly, and spoke no more of Charlie while the visit lasted.

When Harold, on coming home that afternoon, joined his sister in the drawing-room, she quickly opened upon the subject of which her mind was full.

‘Harry,’ she said, as, after settling him beside



her, she began to pour out the tea, 'did you ever call anybody "The Modern Bayard"?''

'The Modern—— *How* much?'

'Somebody has been calling Charlie "The Modern Bayard"; you know who he was, don't you?'

'I believe I have heard of the party. Why, he was a soldier!'

'And you think we might find a better representative! Someone, however, has selected Charlie—Miss Waller said so. Was it you?'

'Have they been here to-day?'

'Yes; when you were out.'

'Glad to hear it.'

'Not that you were out?'

'No; that you were in. I trust you were "pretty behaved" to her.'

'We were both as prettily behaved as possible. We sat and praised Charlie to our hearts' content; only she has not been in his company for a long time, which is just what surprises me.'

'You are easily astonished then, I should say.'

'I am surprised that, not having seen him for a year or two, she should remember him so well and think so much about him. Are not you?'

'Why, isn't he a very nice young man? and ladies like nice young men, don't they?'

'Oh, Harry! I wish you were at all a nice young man, and then you would answer questions and not be such a torment! I mean that

Miss Waller's interest seemed rather unusual; she spoke of his character and asked questions about now in a way that struck me as remarkable.'

There was perhaps a little mischief in Dora's eye as she glanced at her brother to see how he took this piece of information. Harold stirred his tea for a few moments in silence.

'What questions did she ask?' he said.

'Whether he was at home, and about his future life.'

'What he was going to be?'

'Yes.'

'What did you tell her?'

'I told her he was reading law.'

'Which, I suppose, was just what she knew already.'

Dora took up her work.

'Nice young women don't always answer questions either, it appears,' said Harold as he watched her. 'If Miss Waller thinks Charlie's ways of going on peculiar I am not surprised. I do so myself. When I ask Sir Philip about his reading law, I am told it is "a provisional arrangement." When I ask Charlie if he seriously means to go on with it, all I can get out of him is, "For the present, at any rate." I have asked you yourself and Uncle John more than once already, and neither of you ever seem to have a word to say on the subject.'

‘No.’ Dora leant back in her chair with closed eyes. Harold, looking at her earnestly, presently saw a bright gleam beneath the long lashes resting on her cheek.

‘Why, Dormouse, what’s the matter?’

‘It has been a great trouble to him,’ she said. ‘He does not like to speak of it.’

‘What has? He and Charlie can’t have disagreed about anything, surely?’

‘Oh no! But this uncertainty as to whether he will take Orders soon, and come to be his curate. He always thought he would.’

‘But why is it uncertain? What has made Charlie doubt about it?’

She hesitated, and then spoke of Lady Barrymore’s objections and of Charlie’s own scruples during the previous autumn.

‘That is all over,’ said Harold. ‘Why should it alter his plans now?’

She was silent.

‘You see,’ he continued, ‘though I don’t believe it myself for a moment, many will say that as soon as he got hold of this money he didn’t care to be a parson any longer.’

‘No!’ she cried indignantly; ‘who would say such a thing?’

‘Lots of fellows, who care more for money than for anything else going. But, though I don’t believe that, I don’t believe the other thing either. Phil’s all right, and as to knock-

ing under to Frances, I can't suppose he is weak enough for that. I shall ask him about it again.'

'No,' she said earnestly, 'pray do not. There are some things which people want to think over and work out quietly for themselves, without speaking of them. Charlie feels like this about his future life—I am sure of it.'

'Well,' said Harold, after some moments of reflection, 'if I don't ask him about the future I shall about the present, for Uncle John ought not to go on as he does. I've been watching, and I am sure he is more done up sometimes than he was two years ago. He ought to have a good strong curate of his own. I knew how it would be. I knew he would overwork himself when he had to go back to old Marriott, owing to the doings of—a certain mischievous young person.'

'Harry, pray don't! I never can understand how you could laugh at such a truly distressing thing.'

'Well, I won't. Poor unfortunates! But I mean to speak, and, if Charlie isn't coming yet awhile, to tell Uncle John of Grey. You know all about Grey?'

'No, I don't,' she said impatiently, 'and I don't want to know anything at all about him.'

'That's unlucky, as I must certainly ask him down here soon. Grey—the man who was in the Crimea—who wrote out poor Barnes's state-

ment. He is in London now, helping a friend who wants him to stay on and take regular work; but I think we might manage to get him. He is a good fellow, and a clever one—was a coach at Oxford for some years. Uncle John would like him.'

'He would never like *anyone* but Charlie! Ask Mr. Grey to stay here if you like, but pray say nothing about his coming to be curate.'

'What!—you think there might be another "truly distressing thing"?''

'Harry, I shall really go away!'

'But you needn't fear. Old Grey can be trusted—"warranted safe."'

She turned to him with earnest pleading in her eyes. 'Dear Harry, let us be patient. Don't let us do anything to make Charlie fancy he isn't wanted here as much as ever. It is too soon to know what he will settle to now he has come home again. Don't speak of anyone else at present. I wish it *very* much.'

'*Very* much—does she? Well, she's a good little girl, and must not be vexed. I'll wait awhile, then, and we will just see what may turn up presently.'

## CHAPTER XXII.

Oh, to be in England now that April 's there,  
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning, unaware,  
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf  
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,  
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough  
In England—now !—R. BROWNING.

THE Campbells remained at the Hanger until after Christmas and then returned to their London house, promising to spend another fortnight with Sir Philip at Easter. It was time, in Di's opinion, that Effie should begin to see a little of London society in preparation for the full tide of gaiety which would rise to its height as the season advanced. Charlie also spent his weeks in town, and Colonel Merivale was as often there as at the Hanger, but Sir Philip was not condemned to solitude on that account. A room at the Grange was looked upon as his own; he came and went as he pleased, and seldom slept, even for a night, in his own house when the rest of the family were absent.

The week before Easter was to bring down the party from Grosvenor Square, and one morning, when spring sunbeams were filling the air and spring flowers the gardens, a slender figure,

dainty and fresh as the flowers themselves, came over the lawn at Hurst with joyful step, passed through the ever open door and on to the Vicar's study.

‘Come in,’ cried its owner in cheerful tones, as a gentle knock was heard. ‘Ah! there she is—my little maid come already.’

Effie Campbell ran towards him with a happy face. ‘I couldn’t help coming, Uncle John,’ she said, ‘the children have all gone on to the Hanger, and I got leave to come with them and to stop here on my way. Papa and mamma will call for me this afternoon when they come down themselves. Where is Dora?’

‘Out and about somewhere. She will be in soon to luncheon, so sit you down like a good child and talk to an old uncle.’

Effie threw herself into a low seat by the Vicar’s arm-chair, and her little bonnet—the latest triumph of a London milliner—on to the rug.

‘There!’ she said, ‘now we can talk. Am I really, really, at Hurst again? Oh, dear! it seems too good to be true. No more dressing, dining, driving for a whole fortnight’

‘What! this is better than London, is it?’

‘Don’t name them together, don’t speak of them in the same sentence! Dark smoky London, full of dull people, and dear lovely Hurst, full of—Doras and Uncle Johns.’



‘You little coaxer,’ said he, as Effie laid her hand on his arm, ‘that’s just because you know you ought to have a scolding. You have been grumbling in all your letters. There’s a sermon on contentment in one of my drawers—I shall look it out to-morrow.’

‘Now, Uncle John—tell me truly—should *you* be contented if you had to spend the best part of the year in London?’

The Vicar rubbed his hair in some perplexity. He was a truthful man, and had he been the reverse his sentiments on this point were too well known to admit of prevarication.

‘Well, well,’ he burst forth, ‘that has nothing to do with it. Look at other girls. Do you think there are many among them who would not be glad to be in your place, go everywhere, see everything, walk in silk attire’—here he nodded towards the shining skirts beside him—‘and have a fortune ready made to their hand?’

‘Ah! yes’—a sigh too deep not to be genuine heaved Effie’s breast—‘that is the great misfortune; if it were not for that I should mind nothing much. I could put up with London if somebody else were going to have Kildrummie.’

‘My dear child! you don’t mean to say you are going to let that unlucky place make you wretched for ever?’

‘I’m very sorry’—she hung her head de-

jectedly—‘it’s very wrong of me. I do try to bear it well, and sometimes I forget all about it and am quite happy, but then it all comes back again, and I recollect I am twenty now, and in less than a year I shall be forced to have it all.’

‘Well, where’s the misfortune?’

‘It is the dreadful responsibility. I lie awake often, thinking of it. I think of all that money, and all the people wanting money, and the people at Kildrummie. Many are so poor, yet Uncle Angus says if I give them much I shall do more harm than good. I am not at all like “The Heiress in her Minority.” *She* always knew what to do.’

‘Really! Who was she?’

‘She was in a book.’

‘So I should have supposed.’

‘A great fat book in two volumes. Lady Barrymore sent her to me, and said “she trusted I should profit by her admirable example,” so I read her—and she made me miserable! She understood all about draining and building and planting—things I shall never know if I live to be a hundred! Oh, why has this place come to me when so many people would have managed it much better than I ever can?’

‘Little one, don’t accuse Providence. This property was sent to you. You can’t doubt that, can you?’

‘N—no.’

‘And you mean to do the best you can for it, don’t you?’

‘Yes, indeed I do.’

‘And what more is required from any of us than that?’

Effie was silent.

‘You will always have plenty of sensible advisers at hand, so don’t fret about things that haven’t happened, and may never happen. A good half of all our troubles would disappear if people would attend to this one rule: “Sufficient to the day.” Remember that—and there are better words too.’

Effie reclined her head again on the protecting arm, while the kind voice spoke some of the better words for her comfort, then raised a brighter face to kiss and thank the speaker.

‘So you’ll not lie awake any more now?’

‘Not if I can help it.’

‘And you will be a good child, and have a happy visit?’

‘That I will. Oh! Uncle John, there is one thing I want so much. We may—may we—mayn’t we have a primrose picnic? Say yes, please; pray say yes.’ Effie crossed her hands, looking much like the good child she was told to be.

‘A primrose picnic? What! like the old

ones they use to have here? For the little ones, you mean?’

‘Oh! for all of us; let us all be little ones. Dora has told me about them, and you know I have not been in England in April nor gathered an English primrose for such a long time.’

‘That comes of people gadding about to foreign parts instead of staying in their own country! But no fault of yours—and as to the picnic, why, just ask Dora.’ A conclusion with which Effie was more than contented, for when did Dora say no?

That evening the Vicar laid his book down as he sat by the drawing-room fire to meditate, as was his manner of meditating, first to himself, and then aloud to his companions. ‘That child,’ he said, ‘is as unhappy over getting a fortune as many would be over losing one—a strange affliction.’

‘Strange, but true,’ answered Dora. ‘Kildrummie will be nothing but a burden to her.’

‘A burden she is not likely to bear single-handed very long. Does she never reflect upon that?’

‘Never, I think.’ Dora spoke reluctantly, for they were not alone, and she would rather have been silent, but her uncle was expecting an answer.

‘And why not?’

‘She told me once that heiresses had better

not marry, because people want to marry them just for their money.'

'There she showed her sense!' came from the sofa behind them.

'Sense! Nonsense, you mean,' said the Vicar indignantly, 'and unnatural nonsense too, at her age. How came she ever to have such ideas?'

'It was not her fault,' cried Dora. 'You know what happened at Nice.'

'I don't know,' said Harry; 'what was it?'

'Two or three foreigners—I really forget how many—people she scarcely knew by sight even, wrote to Sir Malcolm about her.'

'To propose for Kildrummie, in fact.'

'Of course, and of course she knew it was for that.'

'She should never have known anything about it,' said their uncle decidedly. 'Malcolm should never have told her.'

'Di thought she had better know. She said Effie ought to learn how to be on her guard. Poor Effie!'

'Wrong!' said her uncle decidedly. 'See the consequence. Here she is distrusting all the world, from going to live among a pack of foreigners, with empty titles and empty pockets—as if English gentlemen would do such a thing!'

'Do it?' said Harold. 'Like a shot! It's done every day—everywhere.'

‘Do you mean to tell me that such a girl as Effie would be run after for her money, and not for herself? Why, what are young men coming to?’

‘Grief—half of ’em,’ muttered Harold beneath his moustache.

‘I don’t believe it, and I won’t!’ was the Vicar’s fervent conclusion.

‘Nor I,’ said Dora with equal earnestness.

‘Look at the world around you, and perhaps you will,’ returned her brother.

‘Then, Harry, the world is a wicked place, and I’m glad I don’t live in it!’

‘All right,’ said Harold coolly, ‘but let those who do look out for themselves—that’s all.’

It was too true that Effie had to live in the world, since, if any place deserved that title, it must certainly, Dora supposed, be London. She lamented the inevitable misfortune as sincerely as though she had been Uncle John himself, resolving that Effie’s short country holiday should be made as happy as possible. Everything she wished for she must have, including the primrose picnic.

To maturer minds picnics in June might seem a doubtful pleasure, and picnics in April mere madness, involving certain colds, coughs, and rheumatism; but to all such objections, brought forward in due course when the subject was broached at the Hanger, Dora was provided

with a fitting answer, as she told of delightful picnics in Aprils long past, when every spring Uncle John, Miss Goode, Harold, Charlie, and herself had spent a long afternoon in sunny corners of the Hanger woods, concluding with a rural banquet at the keeper's cottage, in which primrose tea invariably held a prominent place. All these delights, hardly excepting the primrose tea itself, Effie was eager to taste, and after the inevitable amount of objection and criticism had been overcome, the picnic was settled for an early day in April, not on the first itself—as Harold had kindly suggested—but on the first Saturday that followed it, a day when Charlie would certainly be down, and perhaps a greater man than he; for with Sir Philip's cordial assent Effie despatched a particular invitation to the member for Arnborough to join their party. The answer was favourable, and Effie was entirely contented.

Nature itself proved as favourable as all her friends, for the appointed day brought a sky as blue and an air as soft as though the picnic were to be held beneath the olive groves of the Mediterranean, instead of the still nearly leafless woods of England. The meeting-place was a sheltered corner about a mile from the Hanger—a pleasant woodland glade carpeted with short, mossy turf, and defended on each side by high banks with broken chalky sides, above which



the woods began, the white birchen stems glittering in the sunlight. A prettily ornamented cottage peeped out from amongst the trees at the upper end of the glade, whose surrounding coops and numerous broods of small fluffy yellow balls showed it to be a keeper's home. In the garden stood the Vicar, talking with the keeper's wife. Dora, in a crimson cloak, was constantly passing in and out of the cottage, as, with the help of Miss Waller, who had been invited to join them, she arranged the contents of the luncheon baskets inside. The Wallers were becoming known and liked in the neighbourhood, but their relations with the Grange remained those of a different nature to any others. Harry went to Fernhill oftener than Dora thought necessary to mention in her own letters to Di, for Di would not have accepted the interpretation which she herself felt sure was the right one—that it was done out of pure kindness of heart. Whether these neighbourly visits and this chivalrous regard for the mother and sister of his lost friend would ever grow into something more was another question; whether, if it did not, such frequent visits might not produce some mistaken ideas on the side of the two ladies was a still further one; but at present she had seen nothing in look or manner to make her believe that anything of the kind need be apprehended.

While she and Lucy busied themselves with the luncheon, Harold leant idly against the garden fence, poking the little chickens about with his stick, or gazing towards the narrow path by which the Hanger contingent was to arrive.

‘Hallo!’ was his first remark as Charlie presently appeared, leading a donkey laden with baskets, in the middle of which was perched Master Angus, ‘what have you brought that old fellow for?—as a suitable companion to everybody, or because you thought there wouldn’t be donkeys enough to-day without him?’

‘Captain Vaughan,’ shouted Gussie, ‘come take me down. I can’t get off; I’ve a pigeon pie one side and an apple tart on the other!’

‘One foot well into each—eh?’ said Harold as he advanced to swing off the little boy. ‘What worlds of mischief will you be in to-day before you’ve done, young master!’—a prediction which Gussie seemed anxious at once to verify by flinging himself headlong upon a fine family of young chickens, had not this amusement been promptly checked by his father, who now appeared with the rest of the Hanger party. Angus Campbell had been true to his word; and even Phil himself had condescended to honour the picnic, Di alone remaining behind to drive out with Sir Philip. Effie looked radiant as she approached.

‘Isn’t it a perfect day?’ she cried; ‘just made on purpose.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Sir Malcolm; ‘you have provided royal weather for us, Dora.’

‘And if you could only have heard Harry’s prophecies yesterday! Torrents of rain and an east wind blowing all the time was the least we could expect!’

‘Don’t holloa till you’re out of the wood,’ said Harold. ‘Time enough for everybody to catch their death yet.’

‘Is that part of the programme?’ asked Mr. Campbell, as he shook hands with Dora. ‘Does treachery lurk under such a lovely outside? Can no such day be trusted?’

‘Let no such man be trusted,’ she answered, laughing. ‘He is too fond of being a prophet of evil for us to attend to him. Uncle John, on the contrary, promised us a fine day last night, and no one knows the ways of Hurst skies as he does.’

‘I should think not, indeed,’ said Mr. Campbell, as he turned towards the Vicar, who was now coming down the garden path, looking in his own proper person the representative of the day’s sunshine, as he welcomed the assembled company and issued instructions as to the order of proceedings. Firstly, primrose hunting; no one who did not produce at least one handful to be entitled to any luncheon—such was the edict. Afterwards there was a hill to be climbed, with a celebrated view to be seen from the summit,

which would be new both to Miss Waller and Mr. Campbell.

All now dispersed in twos and threes within the neighbouring woods ; Dora, who had again retreated to the cottage, not coming out till all the rest had disappeared, when she took her way alone to a glen at a little distance—a favourite haunt of herself and Harry in the days of childhood. Here, in the quiet sunny hollow, primroses looked out shyly from mossy nests, inviting a gatherer. A store was quickly collected, and, climbing a little higher, where a fallen tree lay in the shelter of the woods, she sat down to arrange her treasures, often letting her hands fall on her lap in dreamy delight, to listen to ‘a thousand blended notes,’ and to hope for the earliest cuckoo. In former days one of the chief pleasures of primrosing had been to bring back large masses of flowers, and lay them with a mossy fringe by Lady Merivale’s side, filling her room with a scent and sight of spring which she was seldom able to seek for herself. Those days came vividly back to Dora as she sat, lost in visions of the past, while the wood-pigeon cooed overhead and the squirrel’s feet pattered beside her. Suddenly a firmer footfall was rustling in the dead leaves. She looked up and saw Charlie approaching.

‘Will you make up these,’ he said, holding out a handful of flowers, ‘like yours?’

‘I was going to ask you or Effie,’ she answered in a low voice, ‘to take these back and put them in the churchyard.’

‘I thought so. I will put them there.’

He sat down also, and watched her in silence, as she arranged the flowers he had brought, and laid them at last beside her own.

‘It is the first time,’ he said, ‘that I have known what it is to see the flowers open here, and not to bring them in to her.’

Dora could not speak; as little could she restrain the overpowering impulse to lay her hand in her companion’s with a clasp of sympathy. The next moment it was withdrawn, and they sat side by side without moving as before, the hush and the music of the woods all round them.

‘How she loved them!’ said Dora at last. ‘Charlie, you always remember poetry; can you recollect that little poem she made you say to her sometimes—“In the woods at evening”?’

‘You mean this:

‘With reverence tread these sylvan aisles,  
With sacred fear;  
Nought that unhallows or defiles  
May enter here.

‘Pure are the flowers in white array  
On fragrant beds,  
That lift, beside the woodland way,  
Their holy heads.

‘Pure are the sunlight’s parting rays,  
The spaces dim,  
Where birds adore in ceaseless praise—  
Earth’s seraphim.

‘Raise thou thy spirit as they sing,  
O sentient soul;  
And let a human offering  
Complete the whole.’

Dora listened, her eyes upon his face. Harold had told her that Charlie had grown very like his mother, and now she felt the truth of his words. A thrush overhead broke out in the same instant into a flood of song.

‘Those birds!’ she said, looking up, ‘I think it is they who really make us believe that spring has come. They seem to bring a message down from heaven to tell us that the woods are open. These woods have been a romance to me ever since I knew them—since we were children here—and you and Arthur such little boys! Do you remember the day when you and he were lost together in the Long Holt?’

‘I should think so!—and Uncle John coming to look for us. It seemed to me as though we had been there for months when at last I saw him coming through the trees. And don’t you remember the gipsy tents we built in the same wood two years later?’

‘That I do! We always meant to come and live in them some delightful day. We were to live on blackberries from the woods, and

potatoes Jerry was to give us from the garden, and milk from the farmer, and sleep on beds of dry leaves, like real gipsies.'

'And then Uncle John and Goody wouldn't hear of it!'

'No! How barbarous we thought them for preventing so much happiness!'

Both laughed as though they were light-hearted children still. Then there was another silence, and Dora's eyes sought her companion's face once more with a doubtful, anxious, and yet eager expression before she broke it.

'Charlie, there is something I have been thinking of, which, perhaps, you might do. I should be so very glad, it would be such a good thing.'

'What is it?'

Her colour deepened as she answered, 'I have been thinking that you might take Orders and live at home with your father, and come over and help Uncle John from the Hanger. It would not be too far, and it would be such a comfort to Sir Philip too.'

She paused, breathless, waiting with a beating heart for an answer which was slow in coming.

'*That* is what you wish, Dora?'

The voice that spoke was low and sad. She glanced at him for an instant, and saw his dark eyes fixed on her in what seemed to be sorrowful reproach.



‘Yes,’ she said hurriedly ; ‘I do wish it.’

‘I am sorry. I cannot do it.’

He rose, and at that moment voices were heard and Effie Campbell appeared, coming through the wood.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

EFFIE was hastening gaily towards them, laughing, lamenting, and holding out a nearly empty basket. 'See,' she said, 'what comes of following a bad guide. Uncle Angus has been dragging me up hill and down hill, and over horrible fences, and I have torn my dress, and lost my time, and found hardly anything but leaves. What will Uncle John say to me!'

'She speaks in sober sadness,' said her uncle, who, with Colonel Merivale, was close behind. 'She knows her luncheon depends on it, poor little creature!'

'Give me the basket,' said Charlie quickly. 'I can get you some.'

She relinquished it at once. 'Thanks, Charlie, very much. You are a great deal kinder than Uncle Angus, who has a whole handful, and won't give me one!'

'Hunger, my dear child, forbids. No flowers no food, you know; and I foresee that exhausted nature will require a good deal of that pigeon pie I caught sight of.'

'Did you though?' said Phil. 'Wish I

could ! Pigeon pie would be more to the purpose than these blessed primroses of ours.'

'Ours ?' said Angus. 'Where are yours ? In your pockets ?'

'Don't know,' said Phil, as he withdrew his hands from those comfortable receptacles. 'Dropped about the place somewhere. Gave 'em to that little beggar Gus—the whole lot of 'em.'

'You had just half a dozen,' said Mr. Campbell ; 'I counted them.'

'More than I did, then. This sort of thing's no joke ; it breaks a fellow's back to keep on at it. When is luncheon coming off, Dora ?'

'At once—as soon, that is, as Effie is ready. I will go on and see about it now.'

She left them and returned to the cottage, where others were now assembling. Nothing was wanting to the luncheon table excepting the floral decorations, which she and Miss Waller rapidly arranged.

'That's right,' said Harold, who was observing the whole with a critical eye. 'Salad half grass—sandwiches all over moss. Most correct.'

'Ungrateful boy ! we are doing all this for your particular pleasure.'

'Thanks. A particular pleasure it is to see that spotted spider burying itself underneath the cold chicken.'

‘Captain Vaughan deserves no luncheon, I think,’ said Miss Waller, as she removed the offender. ‘He has been saying very unkind things about the poor primroses all the morning. There—is it not ready now?’

‘No,’ cried the Vicar, ‘no! The crown, Dora, for the best gatherer—don’t forget that.’

‘To be worn by Uncle John himself, like some venerable Roman over his cups,’ added Harold, as Dora quickly wove a pretty little ivy wreath.

‘No, no, you rogue! You won’t make an old Jack-in-the-Green of me! Ah! here comes my Queen of Spring,’ for Effie was entering with a happy, glowing face, arms and basket laden with her stores. ‘Flora herself couldn’t beat her—so off with the hat and on with the crown.’

‘What gross partiality!’ remarked Harold, as Effie, after a few laughing protests, allowed the wreath to be placed round her small head. ‘He never even looked at our collection, Miss Waller. I shall certainly raise a rebellion in your favour.’

‘Yes, indeed,’ said Effie eagerly. ‘I don’t know why I am to have it—do take it.’

Lucy Waller laughed good-humouredly, and declared there could be no doubt the crown was in its proper place already.

‘And now a throne,’ cried the Vicar. ‘That’s

right, Charlie, that arm-chair will do. Put it at the top. Ladies and gentlemen, her Majesty is seated, and summons her subjects around her.'

It was a merry luncheon party, and a picturesque one, in the raftered room with its wide fireplace and casement windows. Not the least pretty part of the sight was the slender girl at the top of the table, the circlet of dark leaves round her pale golden hair, herself unconscious of all approving looks as she bent down every other minute to satisfy the many wants of the little raven-headed brother at her side.

'More like a slave than a queen,' Lucy remarked in a low voice to Captain Vaughan, who was seated next to her.

'She spoils him horribly,' he answered in the same tone, as his keen eyes glanced upon the pair.

Luncheon finished, the Vicar called for silence, and her Majesty's health was drunk in due form. Effie blushed, laughed, and looked a very charming Queen of Spring as she acknowledged the compliment.

'I owe all my honours to Charlie,' she said. 'It was he who gathered my flowers. So you see,' she added, turning to Miss Waller, 'I am only a usurper, after all.'

'He gave them very willingly, no doubt,' replied Lucy. 'Should you not think so, Captain Vaughan?'

‘Probably,’ returned Harold, who was busily constructing something wonderful out of an orange for the benefit of little Angus, now perched upon his knee. ‘He had no particular fancy for being made a Jack-in-the-Green of himself, I dare say.’ The last words, spoken in an aside to Miss Waller, were intelligible enough to anyone who had heard the Vicar’s speech. Effie had not—but this one, unhappily, reached her. Lucy did not see the deep blush that quickly covered her averted face, nor did she at all understand why the ivy wreath was at that moment raised by the wearer’s hands and thrown down upon the table.

‘So soon?’ cried Mr. Merivale. ‘Is the head that wears a crown so soon uneasy?’

But Effie was already rising and leaving her seat, and on consulting watches it was found that if the hill were to be climbed by all it would be well to start at once, as Sir Malcolm was under strict orders to return home before sunset. The gentlemen wandered forth into the verandah, the ladies resumed their hats and cloaks.

‘The crown shall go back to the Hanger with the flowers, and then you can wear it to-night,’ said Dora, as she laid it amongst the primroses.

‘Don’t,’ said Effie, hastily throwing it aside. ‘It is foolish.’

‘What is foolish?’

‘To look like a Jack-in-the-Green!’

‘My dear Effie—what a fancy!’

‘They thought I did. Captain Vaughan said so,’ said Effie, with an attempt at a laugh, the colour rising again to her cheeks. ‘It doesn’t matter; only I don’t want it any more, thank you.’

She hurried into the garden, where her father was already calling for her, a difficult question having arisen—Was her little brother able to climb the hill, or should he return with the servant who had appeared from the Hanger? Sir Malcolm looked nervous—Master Angus, on the verge of a roar.

‘I will go back with you, dear Gussie,’ said Effie instantly, as she took his hand.

But no. ‘Dear Gussie’ was not to be thus propitiated.

‘You won’t! for I won’t go,’ he said, wrenching it away, while a chorus of ‘No, no, Effie!’ arose from the others.

‘You all say it is too steep for the donkey,’ said Sir Malcolm anxiously.

‘Let him come, let him come,’ cried the Vicar. ‘We can get him along somehow—carry him if he can’t walk.’

‘Yes. You can all carry me,’ shouted Gussie triumphantly. ‘Captain Vaughan will carry me.’

‘Will he?’ said Harold, shaking his stick at



him. 'He's by no means so green as you take him for, young sir! He will have enough to do to carry himself up that place, I can tell you.'

'Well, my boy,' said the indulgent Sir Malcolm, 'I suppose you must come this time, and then if you are too tired you will never want to do a foolish thing again, you know.'

With this pleasing parental hope the whole party set forward down the grassy glade, till Dora, watching her opportunity, drew Harold apart from the rest.

'Harry,' she began eagerly, 'was anything particular said to Effie by you or by anyone about her wreath at luncheon time?'

'Not by me. The various extraordinary ways in which ladies delight to disguise themselves are nothing to me.'

'You may not care for them, but I *cannot* think that you would ever have told Effie it made her look like a Jack-in-the-Green.'

'It did rather. Who said so?'

'She says that you did, and I am sure she is hurt. Harry, how could you? She is so timid and sensitive.'

Harold burst out laughing.

'Do answer me,' she begged; 'be reasonable.'

'You had better tell her to be reasonable,' he retorted. 'I said nothing to hurt the feelings of a fly—though I may have remarked that if Charlie had dressed himself up in it, he would

have looked like a Jack-in-the-Green—as any man would!’

‘Was that all?’

‘That was all—nothing but a Jack-in-the-Green—not even a jackass! How she can have considered it personal I don’t know, unless she and Charlie are to be looked upon as one.’

‘I must tell her,’ said Dora, somewhat relieved.

‘Do you think that consummation is probable?’ he went on, with a side glance at his sister.

‘I don’t know, indeed. Not just now; some day, perhaps.’ Dora stopped to gather a flower.

‘Do you think it one devoutly to be wished?’ Dora was bending over her flower.

He repeated his question.

‘Yes,’ she said firmly, ‘I do, and that will show you what I think of Effie.’

He laughed again. She lingered still, the uncurling fronds of the young ferns seemed to have a strong attraction for her. Presently there was a cluster of early orchids which must be secured at all costs, and she sprang up a thorny bank, to find herself instantly caught and detained a close prisoner. ‘Harry, Harry!’ she cried, ‘come quickly; here is such a cruel old lawyer.’

‘There is, indeed!—a most cruel old lawyer, but very much at your service all the same.’

Dora's start and blush were just what the mischievous speaker behind her had hoped for.

'Oh! Mr. Campbell—I thought it was Harry! This, you know'—she laughed and pointed to a large stiff bramble-briar which had wound itself round her dress—'is the lawyer, as the country people here call them. Would you please call him to take it away?'

'Rather let me deliver you from my brother's clutches myself. "Set a thief to catch a thief," you know, and I think this knife may cut the knot. There, it is done—no, not yet, you are all surrounded—what troublesome fellows lawyers are, to be sure! One moment more. Now, Miss Vaughan, you are free.'

With thanks and blushes she sprang down, unmindful of the hand stretched out to assist her, but gratitude and politeness compelled her to wait, instead of at once hastening away in search of Harold, while Mr. Campbell carefully cut off a piece of the briar, which he examined with deliberate curiosity as they walked forward together.

'And so this is my prototype! Self-knowledge is profitable, no doubt, if not always pleasant. Shall I take it back, and treat it as some people do a skull—hang it up in my chambers as a gentle reminder of what we lawyers all are, or may come to be?'

'You understand, I hope,' said she, smiling,

‘that it is meant to represent a different branch of the law to yours?’

‘Oh, that is a mere detail! We are all just alike: sharp, grasping creatures, seldom letting our victims escape unhurt, inflicting all the tortures we can with impunity to ourselves. Such is our vocation in life, you know.’

‘But the poor bramble has a better vocation. It is often covered with fruit.’

‘True. Well—perhaps we may hope that, in spite of all faults, our labours do result in something like fruit also.’

‘To many I hope, though I am afraid it is a fruitless profession to some.’

‘Ah! you are looking at it from the lawyer’s point of view only. I was considering the general question. Order and justice are fondly supposed to be the fruits of English law.’

‘Of the law—yes.’

‘And there could hardly be law unless there were lawyers.’

‘N-o.’

‘You are no foe to the race, I hope,’ said he, turning to her with an inquiring look. ‘You will have to take it into favour now your friend Charlie is to become one of us.’

‘I have not learnt to think of him as a lawyer yet.’

‘But you do not dislike his entering the profession?’

‘I do not think he will particularly like it,’ she answered.

‘Indeed; may I ask why not?’

‘He will never like London.’

‘A young man’s dislike to London is very like a schoolboy’s dislike to school; one good plunge and it is over. But perhaps that is not your only reason?’

It was not, but she had no wish to proceed. Finding him looking curiously at her, however, she went on, though with some hesitation.

‘I suppose—it is the inevitable misfortune of being a lawyer that it shows you the worst side of human nature instead of the best, and I do not think Charlie would like that at all.’

‘Who does? But if it teaches him to be careful in forming judgments, to learn wisdom in dealing with men, to believe nothing without good proof, are those things to be regretted?’

‘No, not those.’

‘You think also, perhaps, that it tends to make a man suspicious and mistrustful of his neighbours, sharp and hard—like my briar?’

‘I did not mean to say so. Only that I cannot think it will make Charlie happy.’

‘Can you mention a profession that would suit him better? I remember you were not very partial to the army formerly.’

She felt an instant’s surprise. Had he remembered that all these years? ‘I have learnt

to think differently about soldiers,' she said, 'but he is too old for the army.'

'And if he were to be a clergyman, or had been a doctor, your objection might still be made, for clergymen and doctors must see as many of the evils of humanity as lawyers.'

'Yes, but it is to relieve them.'

'Which you think makes all the difference?'

'I do indeed.'

'And may I not claim that lawyers are just as much intended to relieve evil by searching out truth, detecting fraud, settling disputes, and administering justice, as any clergyman or any doctor in the world?'

'Yes, I suppose they are.'

'You do not think, I trust, that we must necessarily deteriorate as men?'

'I hope I am not so unjust,' she answered warmly.

'Thank you, Miss Vaughan; and in return I will by no means deny that there may be some tendency in our profession to make us become suspicious and hard. But even if we do grow "like the dyer's hand, subdued to what it works in," it is our misfortune rather than our fault, and our best cure must be to seek an antidote among our friends. Such friends as Charlie has will surely keep him all you would wish him to be, all that he is now.'

It was so kindly said that Dora turned a look

of gratitude upon the speaker. It met with it a pleasant smile.

‘Let him spend as much time as possible at Hurst Grange. It would be a strange thing if any man could grow suspicious and cold-hearted in such an atmosphere as that.’

How gladly would she have answered ‘We will.’ But she was silent, looking away, to hide a sigh, and the next turn of the path brought them in sight of the Vicar, with most of the party around him.

Not, however, of the whole. Several paths wound through the wood towards the hill for which they were bound, and Effie had managed to lead little Angus into one apart, in hopes that a quiet ten minutes might repress his excited spirits and restore him to something like orderly obedience. A vain hope! Every moment he was breaking away from her hand with ‘I don’t want to be talked to, sister,’ until at last he came to a dead halt by a deep ditch, for a rabbit having been seen on the other side, it must be pursued without a moment’s delay.

In vain Effie remonstrated. He began sliding down the ditch.

‘Stay, Gussie,’ she cried as she caught him by the arm, ‘there is water at the bottom; mamma would not like it.’

‘Don’t,’ roared Gussie, struggling; ‘don’t,



sister, I tell you,' and he struck at her with his free hand.

'Oh, Gussie, that is naughty—stop, think; be a good boy.'

He struck again. She caught the offending hand, on which Master Angus took to his last remaining weapon, and bit fiercely at the little ungloved fingers that held his own.

With a cry of pain she loosed her hold, but the next moment Gussie himself uttered a loud howl as a swift strong hand descended upon his cheek in sudden and unlooked-for vengeance, and Captain Vaughan, who, unseen by either, had been following the same path behind them, seized his shoulders, first shaking and then violently pushing him away, with the words 'You young brute! How dare you?'

The force of the push made the little boy fall on his hands and knees, but instantly rising with a scream of passion, he rushed away down the path.

'He is hurt,' cried Effie in an agony. 'How could you?' She would have pursued him at once, but Harold, standing in the narrow path, stopped all advance.

'Do you want to spoil him for life?' was his short inquiry.

'No, no! But you have hurt him.'

'I sincerely trust I have.'

‘Oh! it was cruel to hit him so hard,’ cried she, the colour mounting to her brow as she looked, not without indignation, at her companion’s unmoved countenance.

‘I can tell you what is much more cruel,’ he returned, ‘to let a boy like that make a wild beast of himself, and *not* to punish him; he will be utterly ruined among you all if you don’t take care—at least till he goes to school, and a nice time he will have of it there unless he is taught better manners at home!’

Effie’s short-lived courage was failing her. She almost trembled at the stern voice.

‘But he’s so little to be struck,’ she pleaded humbly.

‘If he’s struck when he’s little he won’t have to be struck when he’s big, and I suspect he has hurt you much more than I have hurt him,’ said he, his eyes falling on the wounded hand, which she was grasping with an expression of pain.

‘I don’t know,’ she said, loosing it unconsciously.

Harold bent down with a change of countenance, and for a moment took the little hand in his own to examine its state. Four or five deep discoloured marks were plainly visible upon the white skin, and his face darkened again. ‘Little savage,’ he said; ‘I wish I’d hit him twice as hard—and I will, when I catch him.’

‘No, no,’ she cried, in sudden terror ; ‘please don’t, it doesn’t hurt!’

He looked at her for a moment and smiled. ‘What, you would rather, on the whole, that I didn’t hit him into the middle of next week on your account?’

Harold’s smiles were irresistible, they flooded his face with sunshine ; even the fearful Effie smiled back as she answered ‘Much rather.’

‘Very well ; then we’ll make a compact. I won’t lay a finger on him if you will promise not to pity him, nor to talk to him, till I have made him beg your pardon properly. Now will you do it, and walk on while I find him?’

She promised obedience. How could anyone venture to disobey Captain Vaughan?

Onward, therefore, she went through the wood, making, however, but little progress, and often looking back until at last a curious pair appeared in sight—an upright soldierly figure, striding along with an occasional limp, yet erect and awful, dragging by the hand a small, crest-fallen, red-faced culprit, who stopped and hung back at the sight of his sister.

‘Come on,’ commanded Harold.

Gussie came on.

‘Now then,’ said his Mentor firmly.

Gussie hung down his head.

‘Come, Gussie dear, and kiss me,’ cried Effie, holding out her hand.

‘Stop, stop ;’ Harold motioned it down again. ‘That’s not in the bond ! Now, my boy, speak out as you have promised to do.’

‘I’m very sorry,’ began Gussie with a sob ; ‘and I beg your pardon, sister’—another sob—‘and—and——’

‘And you know you have been a very——’ prompted Harold. But this time Effie was too quick for him ; her arms were round the little penitent before another word could be extracted.

‘That’s quite enough, darling ; kiss me now. I know you never meant to hurt sister !’

What can the sternest justice do when the injured party refuses to prosecute ? In this case the evident duty of all was to get to the top of the hill as fast as possible.

Nothing is perfect here below, as one or two episodes in this day had proved, yet on reviewing it from first to last that evening, Effie felt satisfied that to few mortal projects is a greater measure of success granted than that which had attended her much desired primrose picnic.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

‘FILL your glass for a toast, Philip;’ and the Vicar pushed the wine across the table.

It was a lovely evening in May. Such a day as never ceased to excite Uncle John’s wonder why people chose to spend the spring in hot London drawing-rooms rather than in the fields, the gardens, and the woods. Dora and Harold were among the present offenders. The former had been in Grosvenor Square for nearly three weeks now—an unheard-of time—while the latter was sharing Charlie’s lodgings in a neighbouring street. Sir Philip had also been in town for a time, but had found his way back to the Grange on the morning of this same day.

‘A birthday toast?’ he inquired. ‘Not your own, I know.’

‘A birthday of a good part of my life, and one of its best and happiest parts. Fifteen years ago to-day I brought those children home to this old house. We have kept it ever since. So here is their health; God bless them!’

‘Theirs and yours;’ and Sir Philip raises his own glass. ‘You did a good deed that day.’

‘I did. If ever a man brought a blessing inside his doors, I did—this very day.’

‘A deed twice blest,’ said his brother. ‘How much you have done for them!’

‘Nothing!’ and the Vicar struck the table warmly; ‘nothing compared to what they have done for me! They must have come to good anyhow—but who can tell what a selfish old man I might have been by this time without them!’

Sir Philip smiled. ‘I can only say I never saw a sign of it,’ he answered.

‘Then you don’t know! That very day, even when I was on my way to Brighton, I thought half a dozen times what a foolish fellow I must be to be putting myself out for a set of children, and that school would be the best thing for them after all!’

‘Most people wondered that you ever thought differently.’

‘I had got into old bachelor ways already, you see, and didn’t like the idea of being interfered with. That’s what I was—even then!’

‘Ah! John,’ Sir Philip sighed, ‘would to God that no man had heavier sins of selfishness to answer for than you.’

‘None of us are without them, my dear fellow—not one! Well, when I got there I had the grace to be ashamed of myself—I will say that! There was Dora, and that dear child, Arthur, looking like a couple of angels in black frocks, and Harold—I give you my word and honour, Philip—that boy was eleven years old and couldn’t construe a single Latin sentence decently! No one with any conscience could have left him *there*! So I brought them back, and many’s the time I’ve thanked God I did it.’

‘Yes,’ said Sir Philip, ‘you well may be thankful for such a pair as they are. Any man would have a right to be proud of Harold, and still more, to my mind, of Dora.’

‘She’s a jewel, and that’s the fact!’ said the Vicar, with earnest tenderness.

‘You have been happy in keeping her so long with you.’

‘Long! What do you call long?’

‘Well—all my girls were married earlier. It would be a sad day for you when you must lose her, John; but sometimes,’ here Sir Philip looked steadily at his brother, and paused before continuing, with a smiling though stately deliberation, ‘sometimes I have thought you might not be unwilling to share her.’

‘How? What do you mean?’



‘There is no one—I speak it advisedly—no one I would so gladly receive into my family as my eldest son’s wife.’

This from the master of the Hanger! The Vicar was a Merivale—and at this moment almost a breathless one. ‘Philip,’ he said, flinging his hand down on the table, ‘you could not pay her a higher compliment than that! No man could!’

‘Once,’ continued his brother, ‘I might have felt differently and looked higher for him as to rank and fortune. As regards disposition, temper, principles, and true attractiveness, I am convinced that no man could look higher, and these are a wife’s best portion. I have learnt it now,’ and his voice sank, ‘that I have lost them!’

‘Ah—yes.’ The falling cadence in the Vicar’s tones showed that his mind too had gone back to old times—times that had been old even when ‘the children’ had entered the house. That thought awoke others. He gazed silently out upon the evening sky.

‘It is an alliance that would give me true pleasure,’ Sir Philip continued, ‘and I have never doubted that you would feel the same.’

The Vicar started from his reverie. A change had come to him; he was not now a Merivale only, but a better thing, a clear-sighted, warm-hearted man, a firm believer in love as the one sure basis of happiness.

‘You are very good, Philip,’ he said; ‘it would be a great position for her—only——’

‘Only what?’

‘It must be other things that would settle it. She will never give her hand without her heart.’

‘I am of course supposing a mutual attachment to spring up.’

Uncle John shook his head. ‘Try as hard as he might, he could not suppose any such thing.’

‘Well, Philip—Phil’s a very good fellow, but they are not of a sort—that’s where it is.’

‘Nor need they be. Some difference in character is generally advisable.’

‘And I don’t believe,’ the Vicar persisted, ‘that either of them ever thought of such a thing.’

‘I am not convinced of that. He admires her greatly, I have heard him say as much, and a little judicious encouragement might decide him on turning his thoughts in that direction.’

‘She will never give him any,’ was on the tip of the Vicar’s tongue, but fortunately it got no further, Sir Philip’s next words showing what kind of judicious encouragement he was contemplating.

‘Last Wednesday, at Lady Armitage’s,’ he proceeded, ‘I pointed out to him that she was the loveliest girl in the room, and he fully agreed with me.’

‘Oh, ah!—I dare say. But young men must be changed since our day, if they don’t see such things till their fathers point them out.’

‘You hardly take to this idea as I should have expected, John.’

‘They don’t care for one another—I know they don’t!’

Sir Philip drew himself up a little.

‘That seems to be your comfort, but you may live to wish they did, if someone from a distance were to step in and carry her off.’

Uncle John groaned audibly.

‘There is no one else you have been thinking of, is there? Not Angus Campbell?’

‘A London lawyer! Heaven forbid!’

‘My dear John, I shall really believe you want her to marry no one.’

‘Well,’ said the Vicar, with a sigh, ‘I told you I was a selfish old fellow.’

‘Not at all; you would never come in the way of her real advantage. But it would be wise to remember how likely such a thing is to occur. She has been much admired in London, and Di is anxious to keep her there.’

Uncle John sighed. ‘To be sure—to be sure! I shall not have her back again for weeks, I dare say.’

‘Good evening,’ said a voice at the window. Charlie’s face was looking into the room.

The Vicar’s cleared like magic. ‘My dear

boy, come in—come in. How have you come—alone?’

Charlie stepped over the low window-sill.

‘Yes. I found in Grosvenor Square to-day that my father had gone down this morning, so I thought I would follow his example, and ask you to take me in for a night.’

‘To be sure—the more the better.’

‘I must be back to-morrow night; there is a party in Grosvenor Square, and I am to bring up half the flowers in the garden. Dora has written a note.’

‘Ah! how’s Dora?’

‘Very well, and very gay.’

‘Of course, of course.’

‘Malcolm says he shall certainly keep her another month.’

The Vicar shook his head despairingly.

‘But Dora told me privately she was coming back next week, and nothing should prevent her.’

‘There’s my good girl!’ Uncle John smiled once more.

Charlie smiled too, and talked of other things. By the time they had moved to the drawing-room he had grown silent, and stood for some time apart in the bay window, gazing into the summer twilight without. At last, at a pause in the conversation, he turned and came towards the others.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘it is quite true that Davis is resigning the Arnborough Grammar School.’

‘That he is,’ answered the Vicar, ‘and a good thing too one would say if there were much chance of their getting a better man. A bad state that school is in, and always has been.’

‘It would be a great thing for Arnborough, I suppose, if it could be altogether reformed.’

‘Not the least hope of such a thing! It is a poor foundation, you know, and I don’t believe there’s a creature in Arnborough who would put his hand in his pocket to make it a better one.’

‘It was about that I was wanting to speak to you and my father. I had thought myself of offering the trustees a sum of money, on certain conditions, to be spent in improving the buildings and increasing the master’s salary, so that they might get a really good man as master.’

‘But, my dear boy, that would take a large sum.’

‘Twenty-five thousand pounds was what I thought of offering.’

‘Twenty-five thousand pounds!’ exclaimed both his hearers.

‘Yes, that would be all wanted, I think, to turn a bad school into a good one.’

‘It is a noble thought, a most generous thought,’ said the Vicar warmly.

‘Almost too generous, I think,’ said Sir Philip. ‘You will not be a rich man long, my dear Charlie, if you part with your money in this way.’

‘But I never wished to be one.’

‘Not now perhaps, but the time may come when you will feel differently.’

‘True,’ said the Vicar; ‘you may have many to provide for hereafter. You must do nothing rashly. You will marry, and may live to regret the loss of such a sum.’

The colour rose to Charlie’s brow. ‘Even if I lived to want it,’ he said, ‘I hope I should not regret it. I ought not, for I have never felt as if it were mine, like other money.’

‘Indeed!’

‘No, for I had no claims on it. If it had been used as it ought to have been long ago, poor Tom would have been a different fellow, alive now to use it in all probability. It seems to me more his than mine, and as it can never help *him* now, I want half of it at least to go in helping others who may be like him by giving them, what he never had, a good education.’

‘It is hard to gainsay such a wish as that,’ said the Vicar after a moment’s silence.

‘It seems to me a very plain duty. I had been thinking about the school for some time, and when I heard Davis would resign, everything appeared to suggest this plan, as if it all

happened on purpose, and I really had no choice in the matter.'

'No,' said Sir Philip, 'do not deceive yourself. Whatever you may think proper to do will be done entirely as a free gift on your part. No one has the smallest claim on that money; you might keep every penny with a clear conscience.'

Charlie shook his head. 'No, that I could not do.'

'What would prevent you?' asked his uncle.

He paused. It was easier to speak of intentions than of feelings, especially before two hearers, and the colour flushed his face again as he answered, 'Partly, Uncle John, something you once said yourself.'

'I don't remember ever saying one word about it.'

'It was some years ago, in a sermon about the mammon of unrighteousness. You said one reason for giving money such a name might be that fraud and cruelty were too often practised in accumulating large fortunes, and that such money could never bring its possessors a blessing.'

'Aye—I remember.'

'It was in Hurst Church, one summer evening. Tom was there—I was watching him—and I wondered if he was thinking of his grandfather's money, and what a hard landlord he had always been; and then I hoped that he would



remember this sermon by-and-by, and would give back to others some of what might have been taken unjustly from others long ago.'

'And you mean to do it in his place?'

'Certainly. As the money has come to me, the duty has come with it.'

His uncle looked at him with a smile. He recalled Charlie's past history, and silently acknowledged that he had earned a full right to do what he would with his own, without question and without praise. 'Tell us more of your plan,' he said.

This was promptly done. That the number of the trustees should be increased by the addition of a certain number of the neighbouring clergy and gentry, and that the first appointment of a master should be left to Charlie himself, subject to their approval, were the principal conditions on which he meant to make his offer. These and minor points were discussed till a late hour between them; Sir Philip taking little part in the conversation, more from his comparatively slight acquaintance with Arnborough politics than from any wish to oppose his son's project. He had originally looked upon Tom Barnes's bequest with mingled feelings. He was not an avaricious man, and had always been a rich one; family pride had at all times been much dearer to his heart than money. He could himself have made a comfortable provision for his youngest

son without this large addition, and besides some generous admiration for Charlie's munificence, he was not sorry that the world should see how lightly he esteemed the strangely acquired fortune.

The Vicar accompanied Charlie the next morning on his round of visits to the trustees of the Grammar School, watching, with inward pride and delight, the union of modest simplicity and manly sense with which the offer was made. Some gratitude and more surprise was expressed by the Arnborough magnates, to whom the munificent proposal seemed as extraordinary as to the offerer himself it appeared to be natural. A general meeting was at once to be called, the subject discussed, and an answer returned to Mr. Charles Merivale in all due form.

Well content with this result of his labours, Charlie travelled back to town, accompanied by various baskets of the choicest flowers that the Hanger and Hurst gardens and conservatories could furnish ; all destined to flourish and fade in the heat of the London crowd which was that evening to fill Lady Campbell's drawing-room. Parties are frequent in Grosvenor Square in the month of May, and while looking forward to this one in the evening, Effie, that same afternoon, sat bending over the writing-table, filling card after card of invitation to another, as fast as her pen would move. Di had gone out, carrying off Dora,

with a parting injunction to Effie 'just to fill up those cards.'

There was a formidable number, and not half the pile had vanished when Effie's solitude was invaded. The new comer was Harold, who often appeared at the house, and looked in now to ask for Dora.

'She is out,' said Effie, scarcely pausing for an instant in her work. 'Mamma has taken her to pay visits, and they will not be back just yet.'

Harold advanced into the room, and stood contemplating the writer's movements as card after card was transferred from the unfinished to the finished pile.

'As usual,' he remarked. 'Is there any hour of the day that is safe from the composition of this kind of literature?'

'None that I know of,' said Effie, absently, as she bent with a careful brow over her step-mother's list.

'And you have to toil at it?'

He advanced a little nearer, took up a card, and glanced at it with a curling lip. 'Are they shown up when done,' he inquired, 'and does Di ever tear them over? The whole thing looks more like an imposition than anything I've seen since I left Eton.'

'It is about as interesting I should think,' said Effie, as she counted her cards.

'Then why do you do it?'

‘It has to be done, and I suppose it’s all for my good.’

‘How can it be for the good of any human being to write “Tuesday, June the 1st,” two hundred times over?’

‘I meant the parties, not the cards.’

‘I am glad you find them so.’

Effie looked up for an instant, then down in silence, and drew a little pattern on the edge of her blotting-paper.

‘If I wait for Dora here, I shall not be in the way, I hope,’ said he, retreating to the back drawing-room.

‘Not at all.’ She bent her head over her writing again with a feeling of relief. In spite of their adventure at the picnic, she had not conquered her fears of Captain Vaughan; nor had he ever again spoken in the same friendly, unformidable way as in the wood on that day. His double-edged sayings made her uncomfortable, and it was pleasanter to have him buried behind a sheet of the *Times* at a safe distance than standing over her writing-table with the air of an inspector. Just as the clock struck five and she was springing from her seat, the drawing-room door opened again; this time to admit Charlie and a footman, both laden with baskets of beautiful flowers. Effie’s face was a mixture of gratitude and dismay at the sight.

‘Thanks, Charlie, I’m sure ; but oh, if they would walk into the vases of themselves ! See what an army we have waiting for them on this table !’

‘Can’t Dora help you ?’ said Charlie, as he began laying down his burdens.

‘Dora is out. I thought Adèle and I could do them together ; and now I find Adèle had been promised to spend the afternoon with a friend, and I must see after the children at their tea—so these beauties must wait.’

‘How much more in the day’s work ?’ asked Charlie, laughing. ‘A ball last night, a dinner and an evening party at home to-day. What else ?’

‘There are two balls somewhere, but we may not have to go to both.’

‘I hope not, I’m sure. I wouldn’t work as hard as you do for anything.’

‘Why do we, I wonder ?’ said Effie to herself as she began to ascend the numerous stairs that led to the nursery quarters. ‘If people suppose I can be contented with this life week after week and month after month, it is not surprising they should think me nothing but a frivolous, fashionable young lady.’

Her brow cleared again as she turned the handle of the nursery door to enter the upstairs world—that noisy, cheerful region where, from generation to generation, nature reigns supreme,

uninvaded and unchanged by the shifting fancies of fashion which succeed each other on the lower stories of London homes. Half-an-hour spent in satisfying the excellent appetites of the rosy quartette seated round the table, in worshipping the three-year-old 'Baby' and endeavouring to obey the imperious commands of Master Angus, restored her spirits surprisingly. With a light heart she ran downstairs to resume her drawing-room duties, and re-entered the room—to stop short in surprise—the flowers had apparently obeyed her wish, walked into the vases and arranged themselves !

'Who did this ?' she cried. 'Has Dora come back ?' Receiving no answer, she advanced, to perceive only Captain Vaughan in the farther room still busy with his paper. She repeated her question.

'Dora—not that I know of,' said he.

'Then it was Charlie—good, kind Charlie ! Did it take him long ?—is he gone ?'

'He stayed a little while after you left the room, I believe. I did not know that he was up to anything in particular,' answered Harold, as he rose and threw down the paper. 'What has he been doing ?'

'My work ; and how quickly he has done it, and so well—for a man ! I must thank him when he comes to-night. He shall have the prettiest little nosegay I can make.'

‘For such a wonderful feat he deserves anything, no doubt.’

She looked up, not pleased with the half-contemptuous smile on the speaker’s face, which which was to be seen there too often by far for Effie’s taste. ‘He deserves gratitude, I am sure,’ she said, ‘for thinking of such a kind thing.’

‘And you are really going to reward him with those flowers?’

‘Yes, really;’ and she tied a white rosebud, a lily of the valley, and a forget-me-not spray into the daintiest of tiny bouquets.

‘Perhaps he would rather not have it. Great benefactors sometimes wish to remain unthanked.’

‘I should not think there could be many such,’ she answered, as her hands flew from vase to vase, bestowing a finishing feminine touch on their somewhat manly arrangements.

‘I don’t know that. There are plenty of people who don’t care to have a fuss made over trifles.’

Effie raised her head in some displeasure. ‘One may thank people without a fuss,’ she replied, ‘and I do not call a friend’s kindness a trifle. But’—for her gentle spirit was roused—‘I will remember your own wish for the future.’

‘You promise me that?’ he said, looking her steadily in the face.



‘A safe promise—for you are not like Charlie,’ thought Effie. But she only looked down, resettled a plume of lilac, and answered ‘Certainly,’ as Captain Vaughan turned away.

The rooms were filled with company before he reappeared in them—himself the most conspicuous guest, in the brilliant uniform which an invitation to a Court ball that evening had rendered indispensable. But while most eyes were fixed on the soldierlike figure and striking countenance with admiration and interest, Effie’s were turned in another direction. Not all Captain Vaughan’s brave deeds and military glory, dazzling though they had been at a distance, could, in her estimation, counterbalance the cynical words and looks, and the love of criticism which she perceived in him only too frequently; faults absolutely unknown in another whom her eyes were now diligently seeking. But Charlie was in the background, and Dora, who had heard the destination of the little bouquet Effie held in her hand, was amused to see the vain endeavours made by the latter to attract his attention. At length, however, when the last late guests appeared, and just as the summons to dinner was being given, she saw that in the general movement Effie had drawn Charlie by a sign to her side, and was holding out her little thankoffering. Great was Dora’s surprise to see him, instead of accepting it, smile, shake his head, and say a few

words, inaudible to her, but evidently intelligible enough to Effie, who cast one quick glance across the room, then turned away, colouring painfully as she accepted the arm of some gentleman now advancing to take her down to dinner, with a look of complete unconsciousness as to where she was or what she might be doing ; but there was no opportunity of seeing more then, or of questioning her afterwards, as a crowded evening party which succeeded the dinner kept them entirely apart.

At length when the stream of guests was beginning to set away from Lady Campbell's 'At home' towards Lady Dash's ditto, or Mrs. Blank's ball, Dora found herself close to the side-table by the door where Effie had thrown down the flowers as she passed it on her way to the dining-room. She was not far off now, and seeing Dora standing by the table and taking up the flowers, she hastened towards her through the emptying room.

'Oh, Dora!' she whispered hurriedly, 'could you believe it? It was not Charlie after all! It was——'

'Harold?' asked Dora, smiling.

'Yes, really! Could you believe it?'

'Very easily. Why not?'

'But he never told me! He deceived me. He pretended it was nothing for anyone to have done, and made me promise I would never

thank him if he ever did what he called such a trifle.'

'Just like Harry!'

'But it was very kind of him—and I thought so differently—and now I can't thank him. I have promised. But I *wish* I could.'

More remorse was hidden behind these words than Dora was aware of.

'Never mind,' she said. 'You will revenge yourself some day. Ah! here he is—not gone yet,' as a bright vision of scarlet regimentals came suddenly round a corner towards them. 'Are you on your way to her Majesty, Harry?'

'If no one has any further commands for me here.'

'No one wants anything more of you,' said Dora, with laughing emphasis. 'You have behaved yourself pretty well this one evening, I think.'

'Then—good night, Miss Campbell. Allow me to congratulate you on your brilliant party and *elegant* decorations.'

The gay mocking tones and glance roused Effie, this time not to anger but to action. She came quickly forward, holding out her hand, and as Harold took and released it, he found the little spray of flowers left in his own.

'Good night, Captain Vaughan. You see I *can* keep my promise.'

'A—h!' growled Harold, as she passed

quickly on—‘ keeps it to the ear—to break it to the sense—a truly feminine artifice.’

‘ Harry,’ said Dora, shaking her head, ‘ you are more artful yourself than any woman, and deserve a far worse punishment than wearing that little nosegay, which you will have to do all the rest of the evening.’

Probably Dora did not fully understand the rules of military etiquette. Captain Vaughan entered the royal presence half an hour later, unadorned by either leaf or flower.

## CHAPTER XXV.

‘But if she cannot love you, sir?’

‘I cannot so be answered.’

‘Sooth, but you must.’—TWELFTH NIGHT.

MR. MERIVALE would have felt little gratitude to Sir Malcolm could he have heard his frequent entreaties to Dora that she would prolong her visit. It is difficult for any of us to see with other people’s eyes. Her uncle was convinced that to lose more of the opening beauties of the country would be a real calamity. Sir Malcolm was satisfied that a longer change from her usual life would be a great advantage for her; and had various good reasons in his own mind touching the benefit which others would also derive from it, to add urgency to his request that she would remain with them for some time longer. To Dora herself the visit had been delightful. She could not have had a kinder welcome or a livelier house. Harold and Charlie were as much at home in it as herself; and many evenings had brought Angus Campbell for an hour from the House, where he was beginning his new life with eager interest and delight. But pleasant as her com-

panions and engagements were, Dora saw no need to change the original day fixed for her return ; she might be wished for in London, but she was wanted at home, and home she would go. Her chief subject for regret in returning was the thought that she had seen so little of Miss Goode. This was partly due to the latter having just followed her brother's family to Kensington, partly to her own many engagements, and to Sir Malcolm's strict injunctions that she should go nowhere unattended. She was expressing a wish to see her once more on the morning after the party in Grosvenor Square, on which Sir Malcolm himself offered to escort her, an offer gladly accepted.

On leaving the house they fell in with Charlie, who turned and joined them. He had himself, as it appeared, for some time been wishing to visit Miss Goode, and seeing Dora so well attended, Sir Malcolm left them at the gate of Kensington Gardens for his own usual destination in the morning, his Club. The other two pursued their way together beneath the old trees, whose young verdure was shining in its first glory, with hawthorns, white and pink, scattered here and there beneath the large-limbed elms. Dora looked, admired, and owned it wonderful that London could produce so fair a sight, but the charms of the scene were soon forgotten in the interest of the tale which Charlie began to relate

to her. He told her of his visit to Hurst, explaining its intention, and laying before her his plans and hopes for the future of the Arnborough School.

It would have been impossible to find a more delighted or more sympathetic listener. Sanguine and ardent by nature, with a spirit as generous as his own, her eyes shone with gladness, as she thought of the good that he would effect, and secretly rejoiced that none could now believe he had been changed by the possession of a fortune, to which he would show himself so totally indifferent. In his wish to connect it with the memory of Tom Barnes she also entirely agreed.

‘Poor Tom!’ she said. ‘Living or dead, almost all speak against him; they forget what a hard struggle his life was. I wish he were more kindly remembered in Arnborough.’

‘I wish most earnestly that people would be more pitiful.’

‘If they ever are it will be because they see you still own him as a friend.’ She walked on a few paces in silent thought, then said with a sigh: ‘How happy to be a man—to be able to do such things!’

‘That is a very old idea of yours,’ said he, smiling.

‘And it is likely always to be just as old as



myself! But it can't be, so it is foolish to wish for it.'

'What do you want in wishing to be a man—more money, more power?'

'A little more of everything, and more freedom to use it all. Now, if I had been a man, I could have started off to see Goody all alone.'

'Which you would have liked much better?'

'Of course,' she said, turning a laughing face upon him. 'But what would have happened to me if you or Sir Malcolm had not been able to come? He will never let me go down the street alone! One is just like a creature in a cage in London, let out at certain times—with a keeper! There is a nice compliment for you, Charlie, as you seem to be expecting one.'

Charlie began a sentence, stopped short, and pulled down a bough of the hawthorn they were passing beneath to admire its clustering blossoms. When he spoke again, it was to ask some question about Miss Goode's present place of abode.

Dora could not give a satisfactory answer. Miss Goode seemed to be always changing her lodgings, and always for the worse, as Charlie would see for himself.

He did see, and was of entirely the same opinion. After leaving her at the door of a lodging-house in a little street, which not even the May sunshine seemed able to brighten, he walked

on for a while, and then returned to join her in the dark sitting-room to which poor Miss Goode had condemned herself. An odious hole Charlie thought it, the dinginess and closeness of which might well account for their friend's pale cheeks. Miss Goode's unfeigned joy and gratitude for this joint visit, the longing affection with which she inquired into every particular respecting her former home, and the unwillingness with which she at length saw them depart, did not diminish the painful impression.

Dora looked sorrowful as they walked away, and Charlie cried, 'What a horrid little place! Poor, dear Goody, why did she go there?'

'To send another nephew to school! I thought it was that, and found it out for certain to-day; there are such a number of them, and so she had to help, and then to get cheaper lodgings for herself.'

'That *is* generosity!'

They said no more till Kensington Gardens were reached again. When once more in the shade of the trees, with the grass beneath their feet, Dora slackened her pace, and Charlie, taking off his hat, passed his fingers through his hair. 'It is not hard to see,' he said, 'why the last are to be put first some day.'

'No. People who are last in their own estimation it must mean above all, I think.'

'Which is just what Goody is. She never

expects anything for herself, nor any praise for what she does. Dear old Goody!’

Dora’s grave face relaxed into a smile.

‘It ought to be stopped,’ Charlie continued. ‘She ought not to be sacrificing her health like that in her old age. Who *could* live in that street and be well?’

‘Many have to try, I suppose! But what can we do for her? Uncle John increased her income once, and it might be done again, but she won’t allow it. She knows she has money enough to live comfortably, if she did not give it away. It is not only the regular sum she gives, but they are always coming in and getting more! If she lived near us we might watch over her, but what can one do at a distance against a brother and a sick wife, and nine little Goodes always at hand?’

‘Would she not be altogether happier at Hurst?’

‘Much happier, I believe.’

‘And you would like to have her there?’

‘I should like it beyond anything. But she always says it is impossible, because she could not afford both to help them with money and also to live in such a way in the country that she could receive them as visitors, so that either they must suffer or she would never see them—and I suppose this is true.’

‘I don’t see that. Why not put her in a

little house at Hurst, where she could have a spare room or two, and pay no rent?’

‘Because she will take nothing more from Uncle John, or Harry, or me. Still, I have a hope, for Effie says as soon as she has her own money she *will* make her take some, and then perhaps we could get her! Only we must wait.’

‘Why? Why is nobody but Effie to do it? She taught me a lot when I was a little boy, and I’ve never done a thing for her! Why mustn’t I put her into a little house? There’s the old baker’s to be had now. Supposing I buy it and do it up, and then go to Goody and say, “Now, there it is, all ready; go or not, just as you like, but if you don’t have it, nobody else will.” She would go then, you know.’

‘Charlie! are you in earnest?’

‘Of course I am.’

‘But ought you to do it when you are going to give away so much?’

‘What’s the use of having money if you mayn’t do what you like with it? I *will* do it. I’ll write to Uncle John this very afternoon, or go down myself. Nobody can complain; it’s an investment, there’s the house, it won’t run away.’

Dora stopped and heaved a deep sigh in the extremity of her satisfaction. ‘Is it possible. Oh, Charlie—I do think she would take it from

you! And the house might be made so pretty, and the little garden—we might do all that—and it is not five minutes' walk from us—and we could watch over her, we could take care of her. Oh, what a delightful plan!’

‘And you would like it yourself—for your own sake, I mean?’

‘I should like it more than I can say. If I could have had her there last year—but it will be better to have her now we are happy, to make her happy too!’

A flush came over his face as he watched her glowing eyes and radiant smile.

‘Dora,’ he said in low, quick accents, as they again began walking forward side by side, ‘why did you not tell me you wished it before?’

‘Because I never thought of your doing such a thing.’

‘But you might have known that, if there is anything you wish for, I am here to do it, if it can be done. Dora, you have not forgotten last May?’

She started suddenly. ‘Oh, Charlie,’ she cried, ‘not that—no—not that!’

‘It is a year ago to-day. I have waited a year to tell you that every wish and every thought in that year has been yours. Wherever I have been, your image has been with me. There has been no change—none. It is only one more year added to all my years of love

for you. And every year of my life will be like it.'

The low rapid sentences came pouring out like waters long restrained; and flowing with a power that betrayed the force of the hidden source whence they issued. For a moment they paralysed Dora; she grew pale, and her lips trembled too much for speech. He saw her trouble, and, approaching nearer, drew one arm through his own that she might lean upon it, detaining the little hand in its resting-place by his own strong right hand laid over it, and turning her steps down a quiet alley of trees.

'Dora,' he said, bending down to her, as they walked slowly across the freshly springing grass, 'don't be troubled—don't grieve. I would not grieve you, my only love, for all the world. I would give my whole life to make you happy.'

She shook her head, struggling for words, but only tears came.

'Oh, love!' he cried still lower; 'love of my life, say you will let me live for you!'

He clasped the hand he held more closely, and would have drawn it to his heart, but she made a great effort, tore herself away, and, turning, stood facing him with a resolute face, in spite of the tears still filling her eyes.

'You should not have done this,' she said

reproachfully. 'You should not have taken me from Sir Malcolm to say what you know must trouble me so much.'

'Am I never to speak?' said he hoarsely; 'I have waited a year without a word. Am I to be silent always, and let you think I have changed, when—oh, Dora! God only knows how I love you!'

The passionate pleading cry of the last words went through her once more with painful force, but, this time, she was prepared, and did not shrink from the answer.

'I told you a year ago, Charlie, that I am not going to marry. Why do you distress me again like this?'

'What have I asked,' said he in the same tone of suppressed vehemence, 'but to live for you? Let me be yours—I will not ask you to be mine, now. Only let me serve you—live for you—do everything on earth you want done—be with you always!'

Again he drew nearer, and would have clasped her hand, but Dora drew it back.

'You *have* been with me,' she said, 'I never tried to keep you from me. I thought when I had told you the truth, I might surely trust you to behave as you know I wished you should.'

'Dora, forgive me! I cannot be silent for ever.'



‘Then,’ she cried vehemently, ‘if we are separated it will be your doing, not mine! You do not care how wretched you make me.’

‘I make you wretched!’

‘You must, if you persist in speaking like this! How can the old happy feeling go on if you talk in this wild way? We can never be what we have been to each other any more, and it is all your doing—it is you who ruin all and make me miserable!’

‘I make you—*that*!’

‘You do,’ she cried, struggling to keep back her emotion. ‘You alter all the old ways! I had thought now Harry has come back we should have been so happy together as we used to be, but you prevent it all. *You spoil my life.*’

He turned away, walking a few paces forward to lean against a tree in silence, gazing across the broad sunlit space which the avenue, in which they had been walking, bordered.

Dora sank down upon a seat striving to calm herself, but it was a difficult task. A year ago she had persuaded herself that there was no reality in the romance of Charlie’s attachment. It had been a mistake—it would pass; so she had believed, both at the time and afterwards. There had been nothing in his manner since they had again been together to force her to give up this confident hope—a hope destroyed in an instant by his unexpected return to the subject!

She steeled herself to show a firm determination now. If he was resolved, she must be doubly resolved. An absolute refusal to listen would be the only kindness to him; the only wise course for both of them. However hard it might be to pain him, it must be done; and he would live to be grateful to her.

When he came again towards the place where she was seated, she rose and went forward to meet him, with a face of apparent composure. His own was very pale, and they walked side by side for some time in silence. Before, however, they quitted the quieter walks for the more public part of the Gardens he spoke again.

‘You wish me to say no more, Dora?’

‘I do. It is my great wish,’ she answered in a low steady voice.

‘I will be silent. I will not spoil your life.’

‘Thank you.’

It was all she could utter. In spite of her resolve, a great oppression has fallen on her heart. He was as unable to speak as herself, and the walk which had begun in the happiness of unrestrained confidence was finished in total silence.

On the steps of the house in Grosvenor Street he left her with a single ‘Good-bye,’ and turned away. Later in the day, he sent his sister a note excusing himself from coming to dinner that evening, as he found it was necessary to go

down once more to Hurst on business that could not be postponed.

‘Did he tell you what this business is?’ asked Di when she came upstairs with Dora, her own two sisters, and Effie after dinner. The Barrymores had just arrived in London, an event which Sir Malcolm had insisted on celebrating by giving a family party.

Dora said that she believed it concerned some purchase about which he wished to consult their uncle, but could say nothing for certain, and diverted the conversation to Miss Goode, who had sent Mrs. Darrell a message of remembrance, which was not very cordially received by the latter.

‘Oh!’ said Emmeline, ‘much obliged. She is glad to hear I am here again? That means she expects a visit, I suppose.’

‘She would like one, no doubt, but she was thinking that you liked London better than Windsor, I believe.’

‘People should not live so far away if they want to be visited,’ was the languid reply. ‘She knows I have no carriage. She had better call on me, and if I am out she can see the children.’

‘Perhaps you may be in her neighbourhood soon.’

‘That is not at all likely. But I dare say she is often near Mayfair, and cabs can be nothing

to her, with her income, and only herself to think of.'

The speaker's silken skirts were spreading far around. Dora looked at them, and thought of a worn stuff-dress and black apron she had seen that morning.

'She is not rich, Lina ; how could she be so ?'

'Really I don't know who is to be well off if she is not, with all her own savings, and an allowance from Uncle John and from Malcolm besides.'

'She gives a great deal to her brother's family, you know.'

'Oh !—well, if people will do such things as *that*, how can they expect to be rich ?'

'Dear Goody ! It is the very last thing she expects, I am sure.'

Di began making some more inquiries, in the course of which Charlie's name was again mentioned. Lady Barrymore turned suddenly upon Dora.

'Did *he* go there with you ?' she asked.

'Yes ; we went together to see her.'

'You walked there ? How far is it ?'

'About two miles, I should think.'

'Quite an expedition. I imagined he was always reading law in the morning. And did he walk back with you ?'

'Yes, he did.'

'I should hope so, indeed,' said Di. 'He

would have had a good scolding from Malcolm, and another from me, if he had deserted her in the wilds of Kensington.'

Dora had turned away, anxious to hide her glowing cheeks from the cold, piercing eyes which had been fixed upon her, and thankful to Effie, who was beckoning her to their favourite seat among the flowers beneath the awning spread over the balcony outside the windows. Here she might breathe again, and wonder at her leisure why some people should like to make themselves so very disagreeable. Her own reflections since her morning's walk had not been of a nature to leave her mind at rest and peace. She could not have said less nor have acted differently; yet her heart ached now, and must ache for some time longer, at the remembrance of certain looks and words on Charlie's part. How could she teach him wisdom? Must they really cease to be friends and companions until he had learnt it? This question had begun to trouble her greatly. She sighed so sadly that Effie was on the point of asking the reason, when a third figure stepped into their little bower. It was Mr. Campbell, who seldom appeared in the drawing-room after dinner; but this was Wednesday evening, and he could allow himself another half-hour's holiday before going back to his own empty house to be buried in work until long after midnight. He looked like a true

worker ; his face had grown thinner than in past years, and a line had deepened here and there, but the eyes were as bright as formerly, and like his former self was the readiness with which he always entered into the enjoyment of the passing hours, throwing off his load of work as though it were but a trifle.

He seated himself at Effie's side, and asked for a list of their evening engagements, but Effie told him they were to stay at home, and she was glad of it. Dora was tired ; she had walked too far that morning. This, however, Dora would not allow.

‘I often walk further at home, and am not the least tired,’ she said, trying to rouse herself to look and feel as usual.

‘But this is not Hurst, Miss Vaughan, and we have not the audacity to suppose London air can compare with yours in that favoured region.’

‘I am glad to hear such excellent sentiments,’ she answered smiling.

‘And speaking of Hurst,’ he continued, ‘I come to ask a favour—with fear and trembling it is true, knowing the inhospitable character of the place—but do you think your uncle could be induced to give me a crust of bread some day next month, about one o'clock?’

‘I am afraid he would find it difficult. It is not the sort of thing he is in the habit of giving.’

‘The fact is,’ Mr. Campbell continued, ‘the

great Mr. Brown wants to see me on business, and I will run down some Saturday, but I am sadly afraid business may be intended to end in luncheon. Now if I am engaged to Hurst Grange I am saved—and I dare say you can understand that a little of Mr. Merivale after a good deal of Mr. Brown would be most acceptable.—May I come?’

‘He will be delighted I am sure, and if you can choose a Saturday in about three weeks’ time, you may find a good many friends assembled. We are to have a haymaking party down from this house.’

‘I shall be charmed to join them. Does your uncle *never* come up to town himself at this time of year? How I wish he would dine with me if he does!’

‘Thank you—but he is hardly ever here.’

‘That seems a pity; to such a man I should have thought society in London could offer some attractions.’

‘He is always busy and happy at home. He never seems to want more than he finds there.’

‘Ah!—well—perhaps not. And it would be wrong to regret such a disposition, since it is having men like him scattered throughout the country that makes England what she is—healthy in every part. How like Charles Merivale is to his uncle!’

‘Do you think so?’ said Dora doubtfully.



‘I have often thought so, only—you will be surprised, perhaps—but Mr. Merivale sometimes seems to me the younger of the two. Charlie has grown much older of late, surely.’

‘Oh, no,’ she cried hastily, then stopped, colouring.

‘I mean graver—surely you think him much graver than he promised to be as a boy?’

‘He has had a good deal to make him so,’ she said in a low voice.

‘Very true; he may change again.’

‘Yes,’ said Effie; ‘besides mamma has told me that Uncle John was much graver once—her mother used to say so—when he was a younger man. There was a time——’

She also checked herself.

‘Ah! Yes, no doubt. Poor man!’

The instant change to a tone of much feeling drew Dora’s eyes unconsciously towards him with a glance of sympathy. At that moment Effie was called into the drawing-room. He rose also, but it was to take her vacant chair.

‘May I show you this?’ he said after a few moments’ silence, as he put into Dora’s hand a small flat gold case. She opened it and saw a face she well remembered—features of faultless perfection. Her eyes dwelt on it in silence for some time before she handed it back again.

‘It is very beautiful,’ she said, ‘but not more beautiful than she was.’

‘ You remember her then ? ’

‘ I remember her perfectly. It would be impossible to forget her face.’

‘ I am glad.’ He was silent for a longer time than before, then turned once more towards her as he rose—

‘ You do not wonder, Miss Vaughan,’ he said, ‘ that I should feel so strongly drawn towards your uncle ? ’

‘ I never wonder at that in anyone’s case,’ she answered earnestly, ‘ and certainly not in this one.’

‘ No ; he is a pattern and example to us all, however inferior to his our lives and homes may be. And now I must go back to mine and to my work.’ He wished her good-night, and left her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.









